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Maggie Kennedy  
*Vassar College*

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Vassar College

Moving with Our Eyes Closed:

a rumination of the body  
on white masculinity, the carceral imaginary, a habitus of violence  
and other worlds

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree  
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology

by

Maggie Kennedy

Thesis Adviser:

Professor Jasmine Syedullah

April 2019

## Moving with Our Eyes Closed:

a rumination of the body  
on white masculinity, the carceral imaginary, a habitus of violence  
and other worlds

This piece asks the question: why don't white men dance, and what might that have to do with prisons? I ask this question as a way of deconstructing the carceral logic that steeps those of us in the contemporary U.S. Locating the prison regime as a seed of the contemporary violent hegemonic order, I urge us to consider the role the body—asking how our bodies are fed by the carceral logic, and how our bodies' practices feed the carceral logic in return. I consider the somatic and systemic as interwoven—the motions of our bodies as choreographies, conditioned to continue carceral logic but always holding the possibility of radical improvisation. Understanding the prison as a structure and fiber that restrains mobility for people of color, women, trans, and queer people, disabled, young, and working-class people and upon this suffocation offers mobility to the white, cis-hetero, propertied, able-bodied man, I push us to question how, with all this mobility and freedom, the hegemonic body still cannot dance? A fractal focus on this “inability” to dance of white boys begs us to see the movements of our bodies as mimetic with the movements of power. Questioning the freedom of the body that cannot dance, I ask us to consider that only in an abolitionist future will liberation exist. Body wisdom—listening with, to, and learning from what we know on a fibrous, watery, cellular level—is the grounding of this work, and imagining prison abolition is its breath. This piece holds at its heart the possibility for other worlds, other movements, and other (re-membered) relationships with and through our bodies.

with Chusito,  
whose toothy(gumfull) grin guides and grounds any world I want to know  
whose love for play and playful love choreograph resistance  
whose movement builds impossibility  
*¿quieres jugar, compa?*

Thank you to my parents for their time and honesty throughout this process. You so gorgeously hold in tension the differences in where we are on these questions through loving me radically, listening sincerely, pushing me and yourselves to hear each other more openly, and being willing to change with me. Sabina, your touch and words are always grounding and affirming; the way you speak with me resonates cell deep. Thank you for holding questions so tenderly, and revisiting, revisiting, and revisiting again sites and conversations with me. Abby, you have offered me so much of your time, and have been ever-willing to come with me anywhere anytime. Thank you. Jasmine Syedullah, thank you for your time and presence throughout this year—your words and framing have given me new tools to practice envisioning and articulating abolition and for that I am ever grateful. Samson Opondo, thank you for your willingness to talk through my work with me, and your honesty in doing so. Eileen Leonard and Bill Hoynes, thanks for trying to calm all of us thesis-writers down every Friday. Thank you Zoë and Sophie for our continuing conversations and for trusting and celebrating each other's thoughts and practices together. Thank you to Donte for your endless care and respect—for the questions that you ask and that you push me to ask myself. And thank you to Inés, Aida, and Leticia and many others, who so graciously and courageously opened their home to me to learn with them and from their praxis of liberation, movement building and sustaining, and intense love for basketball.

## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction  | 1  |
| Questions   |    |
| Locating Myself   |    |
| Intentions  |    |
| Mapping   |    |
| Chapter One: Hegemony and Habitus   | 13 |
| Chapter Two: The Prison   | 19 |
| Intentions  |    |
| Prison and Hegemony   |    |
| Embodied Carceral Logic   |    |
| Chapter Three: The Dance  | 36 |
| On Violence   |    |
| Unweaving the Carceral Fabric   |    |
| The Middle School Dance   |    |
| Place   |    |
| Pelvis  |    |
| Touch   |    |
| On Imagination  |    |
| Chapter Four: Imaginaries: Prison Abolition and Physical Practice               | 59 |
| Prison Abolition  |    |
| Imaginaries in Prison Abolition   |    |
| Moving Through/With Liberation  |    |
| Somatics and Practice   |    |
| Bodies Through Practice   |    |
| Bibliography  | 74 |
| Appendix: A Praxis  | 80 |
| <i>on love and liberation: a practice in embodying abolitionist imaginaries</i> |    |

## **Introduction.**

### ***Why don't white men dance and what might that have to do with prisons?***

#### Questions.

I'm assuming that many of us have heard before, or joked about how, white boys don't or can't dance. It seems fairly commonplace. We've heard white men say they don't or can't dance, or we've seen them dance and felt the palpable awkwardness in the room or through the screen. Why do we accept this as natural? When we really think about it, isn't it absurd that we take it for granted that white men can't move, while everyone else is assumed to be able to? This is the crux I want to sit in. The discomfort I want to move with and deconstruct.

The ways we know and use our bodies cannot be entirely separate from the realities we operate in and construct around ourselves. I can't help but wonder how the violence inscribed in the structures and logics that surround us—particularly those of incarceration—lives in our very bodies. What is it about the way we move in the world, that makes it seem so natural to devalue, divide, and dispose of certain bodies? If our practices are “structuring structures” as Pierre Bourdieu suggests, how do the ways we inhabit our bodies, and move with and around bodies aside our own, both structure social structures as violent as incarceration and its logic and how are they structured by this very logic? How do the ways we learn and teach with our bodies further violence, and inhibit our practice and pursuit of collective liberation? What role do bodies play in the normalization of this world of violence, and what can they do in helping us imagine other worlds?

#### *What does white men's “inability” to dance have to do with prisons?*

Within the context of the contemporary United States, I aim to explore the relationship between body and structure. The practice of incarceration, personally, I find to be one of the

most deeply ingrained social structures of violence—a practice that is not the exception, but whose existence helps constitute and uphold all systemic violence. Incarceration is about the body—taking bodies away from their place, their people, and taking away much of their bodily autonomy. The ongoing act of incarceration clearly, too, necessitates bodily work—building prisons, being judges and lawyers, working as a corrections officers or parole officers, policing and surveilling. The restriction of movement for those incarcerated and targeted by the prison system—explicitly in cells, but also through surveillance, policing, and systems of oppression that systematically limit the corporeal choices, geographies, and movements and people of color, women, trans, and queer people, the working-class, disabled, and young people—seems to go hand in hand with the ability of those of us with systemic privilege to move freely. There is a symbiotic relationship between our bodies and the structures we inhabit. But then there is the logic. Is there bodywork being put into the maintenance of this violent logic? How are we implicated? What kind of tension of motion exists in the bodies of those of us with systemic privilege—is a freedom built upon immobility an immobile freedom of sorts? Where can we go with this understanding?

I will center bodily practice as I navigate the ways many of us have come to think of incarceration as a normal practice, separating people as second nature, and violence as disembodied. In deconstructing what Beth Richie terms “the prison nation” (2012) and its hold on our imagination, I will analyze the constructs of violence that uphold such a system: capitalism, whiteness, hegemonic masculinity and ability. Looking at how whiteness, masculinity and ability are created through performance means centering the idealized body. I will turn to somatic studies, practices of body-mind centering, and dance researchers to help me understand the writing and re-writing of these violent constructs through physical praxis.



I am posing these questions not with intentions of finding answers, but with the intention of bringing ourselves fully—our very bodies—into the question of building “a world in which many worlds fit” as the Zapatistas say. Building this world demands and celebrates multiplicity. There is no space for essentialism, or one theory, one vision, one practice in these worlds. So here I ask for your generosity of heart through this piece. In working against prisons and their logics as I understand them, I am working through my body. I am not assuming that our bodies are the same or should be similar; coming from my own body, this piece will clearly be shaped in a way that is reflective of my body and my experience. In imagining other worlds I draw from my life—the worlds I paint might not be those you imagine. Please see space for multiplicity. I am merely offering one understanding, one imagination, one world—many worlds, imaginations, understandings, and bodies must interweave to build the kind of world the Zapatistas hold on the horizon. This is just one small thread. Use it to sew imaginations of radical worlds as you care, or don’t care, to. I see the value of this work in its bringing together of spheres of thought and movement that I see as often divided—dance, sociology, philosophy, movement practice, organizing—to work on creating a fuller idea of our place, and power within reality-making.

### Locating Myself.

#### *Who am I?*

I am a dancer and a prison abolitionist. These textures of viewing the world are braided—I can’t untangle them. I understand in terms of patterns of motion, spatial power, choreographies of violence and resistance. I believe that as our bodies are always already in space and time, moving or still, we are always enacting a sort of choreography. The spaces we occupy, how we move, how we understand our bodies and how they interact with one another I think is entirely inseparable from systemic power relations. I hold true that there is, therefore, immense power in

our movements, that there are possibilities unbound for movements, choreographies, of resistance, resilience, and growth.

I understand the systems of violence that choreograph the world, and particularly the contemporary U.S., through the lens of prison abolition. To me this means that I see the interworkings of systems of oppression—white supremacy, the cisheteropatriarchy, and able-bodied capitalism—as sort of coalesced in the prison. The prison as justifying and promoting these systems—as their lifeline. I also see the ideology, and imaginary, that upholds the prison as performing work for systems of oppression and violence writ large. I believe that to work against prisons is to work against violence everywhere, and to work against violence anywhere is to work against the logic that prisons rest upon. I believe that other worlds already exist within this one where violence is not the order of the day, and I believe that we can move towards and through these worlds to eventually build a world where prisons don't exist, and the idea of a prison seems, to the collective, a ridiculous notion.

I understand bodies as central to the fabrication and creation of reality. I believe that we can't consider the violence of the contemporary U.S. without considering our bodies, each of our bodies, and how they exist in the moment. I also believe that if we honestly are working towards a world without prisons, we have to take the role of our bodies in creating this world seriously—we have to question our corporeal practices, patterns, and reflexes, and consider how these postures and movements might be related to the creation and (re)creation of reality. In moving towards and with a prison abolitionist future, we owe it to ourselves and each other to sit honestly with our bodies and practice new ways of orienting, centering and moving in the world that just might have a role in remaking it.

*Coming here*

I've been a dancer almost all of my life. I've always loved movement—its texture, possibility, and the home I find within its stillness. So I would say I've always understood in terms of movement and choreographies. For most of my childhood I never thought much about, entered, or knew people affected by prisons.

My first ground-shift relating to systems of power was in high school specifically relating to prisons. I stumbled upon Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* (2012), as many friends my age at this time had. What? Prisons are doing what? I was on board with the idea that prisons are abhorrent pretty quickly. But that was just it—the idea. I thought prisons were over there. Not right here. Not in my life, my body, myself. Friends encouraged me to read Angela Davis' work not too much later, and I read some of bell hooks' words on love and liberation around the same time, these introduced me to abolitionism and centered relationships in my understanding of what abolitionism means. And still I thought about prisons, but I didn't feel connected to, or implicated in, their reality. I read and listened more, learning from prison abolitionists about why reform isn't enough, what it could mean to build a world without prisons, and the power of the imagination in this work. At this time I went to some meetings and conversations, and worked at a transitional community for formerly incarcerated people where I met my friend Donte Walker who guided my understanding of the violence of prisons through his everflowing friendship and willingness to share.

In college I came across classic sociologists first, learning of Pierre Bourdieu and Antonio Gramsci in my first years. Their concepts habitus and hegemony offered me language to articulate more a vision of systemic social power that involves the body. I then came across so many wonderful abolitionist scholars and activists who convinced me, and continually convince me, that prison abolition is not only necessary, but possible, and involves a plethora of deeply

beautiful messy practices. These are people like Mariame Kaba, Bryan Stevenson, Martha Escobar and countless others. Around this time I also read some on gender and performance studies from folks like Luce Irigaray, Harvey Young and José Esteban Muñoz, and was introduced to black feminist theorists like Kimberlé Crenshaw and Cheryl Harris. The framework of performance and the demand for recognizing intersections and connections that these offered me helped me see the ritualized movements of power around me as simultaneously far more complex and simple than I could have ever articulated. The knotted understanding of identity, politics, and performance this gave me showed me loopholes—ways of seeing how resistance works in the mundane movements of the body. I worked in part on a campaign to get police out of Minneapolis public schools with Young People’s Action Coalition around this time. This taught me of the pace of movements. That there are rhythms to working with people collectively, unpredictable, messy, and whole.

I then had the unparalleled gift of living with members of the Zapatista community for a few months. With these comrades I felt the immense power of collective motion, choreography, and celebration within radical systems-changing work. I was given a vocabulary that centers the possibility of children, truth of multiplicity, the land and its symbiotic relationships, a poetics of building and walking and dancing, that centers silence and strategic communication, and that enacts other worlds.

In this past year while writing this thesis I have read more work in movement studies from people like Randy Martin and Danielle Goldman, along with many afro-pessimist writers like Hortense Spillers and Alexander Weheliye and afro-futurist creators like Octavia Butler and Alexis Pauline Gumbs. These folks, along with poetic luminaries such as adrienne maree brown and Silvia Federici, have helped continually spiral me towards a center of imagining other

worlds, and remind me of the embodied, fractal relationships between bodies and systems of power.

I'm currently working on trying to practice the abolitionist politics that I believe, and trying to push myself to be more present in the on-the-ground work of abolitionists today. Prison abolition involves a messiness of tenses—a muddying of future and present, a working now on immediate material changes, while simultaneously theorizing, working within, and towards other worlds. I tend to feel more comfortable in the latter, and lose sight of myself in the present. The flow of this piece roughly maps the weaving that has happened with my understanding of prison abolition: how I've come to focus on its place in and through the body. This comes from sitting with prophetic thinkers and people within my life on love and liberation, radical theorists and movement workers on prison abolition and systems of oppression, dancers and movement theorists on the centrality of the body and corporeal magic.<sup>1</sup> The interactions of these words, practices, and pleasures feed my belief in both the possibility of building a world without prisons and the beauty and multiplicity of such work. Where I am now is heavily centered on the body in this building, focusing on the daily patterns we have and hold and the power they have within and against the contemporary systems of power. I want to, and will, practice implicating and questioning my body more, and I also want to, and will, move towards more concrete, collective actions against the prison regime.

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<sup>1</sup> I want to acknowledge that throughout this thesis I choose to not focus on the divergences of the thinkers that I cite, but I want to recognize that of course these thinkers are not all theorizing the same thing. I choose to pull from their works in ways that weave into my own thoughts and not spend time on what I don't agree with in part because of space in this essay and because I wish to focus on the ways that people can offer supporting theories in conversation with one another that have inimitable value regardless of the other aspects of their work that I might not agree with. In doing so I hope this centers the multiplicity of abolitionism—that there is no one path or practice, and people are not statically more or less abolitionist in comparison with one another, but are ever-changing bodies in conversation.

This weaving of relationships, texts, experience, and reflection brought me to my thesis question. I have heard variously, both in casual conversations with friends and through reading: “masculinity is a prison,” “whiteness is a prison,” and “capitalism is a prison.” Each time I’ve heard this, or something of the like, I can’t help but wonder how the structures depend on and implicate one another—the physical structure of the body and its structuring of our concept of reality, and the physical structure of the prison (and prison nation) and how it is structured by the logic of carcerality. To me, sociology is about complicating that which is closest to us, what we consider most natural or normal, by analyzing it in the context of society. What could be closer to us than our bodies? The very agents that construct social reality—clearly, they’re deserving of analysis. I also believe that in order to construct a world without the systemic violence of this one we have to believe that it is possible to build another world. Part of coming to believe it is possible involves practice imagining what such a world might look like—and practice embodying what such a world might feel like.

*Where am I and where am I going? What work is this piece doing?*

I want to use this piece as a space to solidify my own coming to, with, and through prison abolition and as a process of reflection on what I want my abolitionist praxis to be like now and into the future. I write this piece knowing that my whiteness, cis-gender-identification, ability, and access to wealth mean I will likely never be incarcerated and I don’t wish to pretend I know or feel incarceration or its effects in the same way at all as those who are locked up, who have been locked up, or who are intimately affected through family and loved ones. But as a practice of sincerely believing that the violence of incarceration does not exist separate from me, I choose to critically analyze the prison regime and the ways it lives within myself and people who relate to me. I believe that incarceration is a tool of genocide. Millions of people in the contemporary

U.S. are being violently held right now. And I believe that to not be thinking critically about prisons and my relationship to them I am ignoring my always-already complicity in this violence. I also want this piece to be a resource to share with people I love, and people I don't yet know, who think prisons are fucked but don't know where to put their feet and what steps to take. I write this piece hoping it offers a way to see the system and its work through our bodies and ourselves, and to ask us to open our consideration (expand our view and sensations) of the prison system and hold space for more tools to come into conversation in the dismantling of this world and the building of better ones. I want to offer these thoughts as an opening to conversations.

### Intentions.

*Who is “we” in this piece?*

I also hold true that, roughly as Lilla Watson says, my liberation is bound up with yours. This thesis is a practice in thinking about how with the violence we are doing to each other or “the other” we are also doing violence to ourselves; thinking about how we (particularly those of us with systemic privilege and power) are inhibiting all of our liberation. Instead of looking at the bodies of people who are incarcerated, or those who feel intimately affected by the criminal (in)justice system, I want to problematize the bodies of people who may never have even thought of themselves as affected by or implicated in the criminal (in)justice system. Clearly this is not just about cis-hetero, white, able-bodied, propertied, male bodies—it is about the normalized body in the contemporary U.S., the body that defines hierarchies of power, and wields systemic power—creating, sustaining, and invisibilizing patterns (ecosystems) of violence. This is about the body we are taught to be if we wish to be seen, heard, or valued as a body and a person. The

body that has access to “healthy, safe” living—a living that is not constantly threatened. I want to focus on this embodiment.

I use “we” to address a general group, but also a group without explicit boundaries. To the degree that you resonate with my “we,” allow yourself to feel implicated, but if you don’t feel my “we” is you (with thoughtful consideration, understanding it might just feel more comfortable to not be you—if this resonates, please try to push yourself a bit), then it’s not you. No sweat. I entirely know that this “we” is not a fixed group. Those who resonate with some things I say may not with others— “we” are an incredibly diverse group in our lived realities and physical embodiments. I am basing my use of “we” around my own understandings and sentiments within the world (at various points in my life and days); if you feel yourself or not in this “we” is up to you, please let it roll of if it’s not you, and please sit with my words if you see yourself within them.

I am writing this for my dad. For the “my dads” out there. For people who know prisons are awful, but aren’t quite sold on prison abolition yet. For those of us who don’t think we are directly impacted by or implicated in the prison structure, largely through our whiteness, cisheterosexuality, maleness, able-bodiedness, and property or proximity to this “ideal person.” For those who feel bodies are a silly place to focus on, and that this thesis might be a waste of consideration. Please engage here.

*What I ask of you all as you move through this piece...*

Please try to be open. These are personal concepts and the work we are trying to do here will require practice. It will definitely have bumps, but it will be part of our working to build a world without prisons if we are honest in our conversation—if we come with our full bodies, or as



full as we can be in our presence, and are willing to implicate and involve ourselves. Thank you for your presence.

### Mapping.

In following the course of my coming to the question *why don't white men dance and what might that have to do with prisons?*, I begin with hegemony and habitus. In Chapter One I put these two concepts in conversation with one another to place the body at the center of systems of power, and offer a groundwork for why we will be focusing on the body in relation to the prison regime throughout this thesis.

Chapter Two places the prison at the center of hegemony. It locates the prison as a tool beyond the brick and mortar walls—as a logic that enfolds our lives into the reproduction and maintenance of hegemonic power relations. I trace this carceral logic into our bodies, as a way of asking what our quotidian movements can tell us about carceral logics, and how they can be a site of potential disruption.

In Chapter Three I implicate the hegemonic body—the white, able-bodied, propertied, cis-hetero man and his proximates—in carceral logic. I ask us to see how not only are those of us with systemic power playing into the prison regime, but how our bodies are being effectively controlled by it as well. This is to ask, how are we, at deep somatic level, limiting the potential of our movements and freedoms through the embodied carceral logic, and to ask then, might we not all have a physical stake in prison abolition? I attempt to offer these thoughts through mapping the carceral logic within the hegemonic body at a middle school dance—by analyzing a mundane spectacle (the dance) and seeing how our bodies are mirroring the logics of a larger spectacle of violence made mundane (the prison).

I then come to the space of the imaginary in Chapter Four. Hopefully, I have raised some seedling of an idea that our bodies show how we are all confined by carceral logic, and any true freedom would necessitate the abolition of prisons. So we turn to prison abolition, and the role of imagining other worlds. I present the body, still, as a crucial site for (not only the maintenance of the prison regime, but also) the destruction of the carceral logic, and the imagination and materialization of abolitionist alternatives. If we understand our bodies as always already within a socio-spatial choreography of power, the spaces for resistance and building other movements are boundless. I offer dance and improvisation as potential sites (and frameworks) for the practicing of, and through practice the building of, other abolitionist worlds.

This work closes with a practice in conversing with our bodies in Appendix A. I want to offer an example of what words can build within my body; feel free to pull from it or ignore it as you like. It is a weaving of sensations and visions that re-member within my body the worlds that are, could, and can be. And in grounding myself through the words that I lean on, I find power and energy to work at building such a world within the cracks in this one.

## **Chapter One:**

### **Hegemony and Habitus**

My aim with this chapter is to bring into conversation two instrumental sociological concepts: hegemony and habitus. By thinking with these concepts in tandem, I hope to offer a framework for you to engage with throughout this piece that critically implicates and involves our daily bodily movements in the motion of systems of power at large. I choose to start here, while I entirely believe that the concepts of hegemony and habitus are articulated and taken seriously in various shapes and languages by people from a multiplicity of sites, because this is the language I found at the time I was weaving together the grounding ideas of this thesis.

Originally offered by Karl Marx, the term “hegemony” was expounded on by the early twentieth-century Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. According to Gramsci, “hegemony (‘predominance by consent’) is a condition in which a fundamental class exercises a political, intellectual, and moral role of leadership within a hegemonic system cemented by a common world-view or ‘organic ideology’” (Ramos 1982). This “fundamental class” builds and maintains their power through hegemonic control. Political scientist Hyug Baeg Im writes, “Hegemony, i.e., organizing the consent of subordinate masses, is based on the ability of a social group to represent the universal interests of whole society” (1991:127). The powerful class must frame—through normalized patterns of thought, practice, logic, ideology, theological- juridico-political structure, culture, media, academia, and art—the way that the world is structured for their gain (in the contemporary US, capitalism) as normal, natural, and less scary than any alternative.

In the contemporary US, this “fundamental class” is made of the profiteers of late-stage capitalism: the cis-hetero, white, propertied, adult, able-bodied men, and those who can mimic them or gain access to their power by proxy. From here on out, I will refer to this conceptual

class of people, this person, as the “hegemonic human.” I use this term to evoke both how hegemony is built and maintained upon the notion of a singular and exclusionary conception of “human,” and how hegemony exists to maintain the privilege and profit of this “human” to the violent detriment of all other humans (clearly to drastically different degrees and forms). This hegemonic vision of what human is, what normal is, what deserving is, defines itself in contrast to other bodies and forms of being. I imagine this space, this conceptual body, from my own history—from what I have gathered in working an understanding of white supremacist, settler colonial, able-bodied, capitalist, cisheteropatriarchy into the ways I move and bear witness to those around me moving. I am not saying that all, or only, cis-hetero, white, propertied, adult, able-bodied men are in this class and benefit from the current hegemony, but I do believe that this hegemonic human, through their structural power, performs and articulates (symbolically, rhetorically, structurally, and practically) the hegemonic understanding of what is normal, and what is possible.

Messages of hyper-individualism, othering, competition, and violence are presented across the U.S. as normal, inevitable, even intrinsically human. These are the fundamental seeds of capitalism; in order for capitalism to persist we must ideologically, even physically, believe that life is a struggle of one against another, a zero-sum game. Mind you, I’m not saying that this hegemonic human intentionally structures and promotes thought and action that enable the survival of their class to the violent detriment to all other people. No. I don’t think that it is necessarily fully, or even largely, conscious. I do think that in the contemporary U.S. we have been conditioned to think of our own survival as an individual, hierarchical, competitive struggle fought among other living beings, thus the ways of living that are already in place that benefit the hegemonic human will often be repeated as they have been framed as universal. This is not to

say that people who are not this hegemonic human simply take these understandings as their own, but that this human has access to the resources to permeate the social world with their conceptions, and if we are immersed in anything for long enough our permeable fabric of a skin is likely to absorb it in some way.

Also concerned with the structuring and dynamics of power is Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist born a few years before Gramsci's death. Bourdieu presented a concept of *habitus*, which will be helpful in our conversation. Bourdieu states,

“The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (1990:53).

The way that one walks through the world is simultaneously formed by the particular world as it exists and has existed around them, and is forming the particular world as it exists and will come to exist around them. Bourdieu's *habitus* helps conceptualize how people are always in flux with the world, but this flux is mediated by what we practice as possible. Our conditioning—through systems we live within, relationships we have with other people and beings and spaces and times—shapes how we exist, and how we exist shapes what we think is natural or possible, in turn shaping how the world continues. From tastes, to ideology, to religion, to goals, we are structured by the world around us. Living within capitalism, our selves are structured by our various identities, positionalities with relation to power, and motion throughout spaces and times. The hegemonic human is structured, and structures all of us, by the systemic status quo in a way that tries to teach us to continue this system. Bourdieu notes that “*habitus*—embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history—is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product” (1990:56). A living history gets caught in the cycle of recreating

what it has been: “The *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices—more history—in accordance with the schemes generated by history...[we] constantly [create] a history that inevitably appears...as both original and inevitable” (1990:54, 57).

I am interested in the habitus of the body. Bodily habitus is the way our bodies are continually made by our environments, and how we continually make our environments through our bodies. As Bourdieu claims, “Structures incorporated into appropriated physical space become incorporated structures—cognitive schemas, principle of vision and division” (1995:15). Structures are incorporated into the physical practices of our bodies. Into our very selves. The ways we are taught to hold, use, occupy, and understand our bodies is not independent of the world around us. The time, space, and historical condition we live within structure how we continually learn with and from our bodies—how we move, feel within, and feel with. As the project of the hegemonic human is the normalization of “his” world for us all, part of this involves the normalization of his habitus, and particularly his bodily habitus. Habitus helps us note the hold that hegemonic systems of power and violence have on our bodies—for this structured power and violence to appear normal, its incorporation into our bodies must go unquestioned. And as the hegemonic human sculpts himself as simply human, objectively human, his subject, his body, and himself as part of sociological conversation often goes unanalyzed. I want to lean in here. Dance scholar Maxine Leeds Craig explains, “‘bodily habitus,’ [Bourdieu] argued, ‘is what is experienced as most “natural,” that upon which conscious action has no grip’” (2014:10). What are the normalized ways we are taught to conceptualize our bodies? How are the ways we feel with our bodies structured by the violence of contemporary systems of power? How can different ways of moving be practiced, and how can these practices work at structuring a different world?

The bodily habitus of the hegemonic human is, what I will call, the hegemonic body. This idea of the hegemonic body refers to the ways that we are taught, through hegemonic culture, to understand and be in our bodies. Bourdieu writes,

“There is no space, in a hierarchical society, which is not hierarchized and which does not express social hierarchies and distances in a more or less distorted or euphemized fashion, especially through the *effect of naturalization* attendant on the durable inscription of social realities onto and in the physical world: differences produced by social logic can then seem to arise out of the nature of things” (1995:13).

The logics that govern the contemporary order in the US—the hegemonic logic—are not only intangible ideas, but they can also be found written into the physical. However, they often go unquestioned, as they are assumed to be natural. I propose that in questioning the hegemonic order and its logic, we question what we often consider to be most natural: our bodies.

The ways that we inhabit our bodies—feel, understand, and move—are not natural, but are made by and are making reality. As Bourdieu claims, “Symbolic power works partly through the control of other people’s bodies and belief that is given by the collectively recognized capacity to act in various ways on deep-rooted linguistic and muscular patterns of behavior, either by neutralizing them or by reactivating them to function mimetically” (1990:69). Power is exercised coercively on all of our bodies by our historical condition—capitalism and the power structures it necessitates and upholds are rewritten through our bodies—

“the progressive inscription into bodies of the structures of the social order is perhaps accomplished, for the most part, *via moves and movements of the body, via the bodily poses and postures* that these social structures reconverted into physical structures—organize and qualify socially as in rise or decline, entry (inclusion) or exit (exclusion), bringing together or distancing in relation to central and valued site” (1995:16).

The ways we are taught to distance or proximate ourselves to certain bodies, the ways we find our bodies sexualized by others or that we sexualize other bodies, the tenderness of our touch with certain bodies over others. The ways we touch and move ourselves, the sensory stimuli that we learn to intake, reproduces the way we think the world is naturally: violent, distant, isolated.

Bourdieu explains, “Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking” (1990:69-70). We have patterns of movement, from how we sit, sleep, walk, talk, laugh, and touch to how we process. The ways we practice using and feeling our bodies cannot be separated from the ways we practice processing, understanding, and imagining the world and its possibilities—

“Because the *habitus* is an infinite capacity for generating products—thoughts, perceptions, expression and actions—whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it provides is as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproduction of the original conditioning” (1990:55).

Our bodies are conditioned to reproduce their surroundings. But bodies are elastic. We can practice disruption—practice a counter bodily-hegemony.



## **Chapter Two:**

### **The Prison.**

#### Intentions.

Prisons are fucked. In this conversation I'm making the assumption that if you're here, in some serious way you see the violence of the criminal (in)justice system (Cacho 2012) and believe it is sickening, infuriating, and something that demands consideration and change. My intention in this chapter is not to convince you of this—there are plenty of other writers, thinkers, and speakers I recommend you spend time with to more wholly grasp what is at stake (or even if you feel you have a steady grasp, these works deserve to be sat with and chewed on). These people have spent countless years and energies in thoughtfully articulating critiques and deconstructions of the carceral system so that we may be moved to sit with these critical questions more honestly and perhaps be moved to mindful action. They have led me towards abolitionism through pushing me to believe a world without prisons (and the complete social and embodied transformation that entails) is both necessary for our survival and any vision of entangled freedom, and is possible. Their works draw prison as a product, technology, and prescription of all forms of systemic violence—imprisonment as a practice and paradigm that disproportionately uses violence against people of color, trans people, queer people and women, the young, the working class, and the disabled. With their words and visions, we can understand prison as a historical technology that comes from and exists for the white supremacist, able-bodied capitalist, settler colonial cisheteropatriarchy. I choose to lean on these animating works, as they have graciously offered me such undying power in their words, and I believe they will continue to do so with you. I want to spend a moment noting some of those people here, to avoid the possibility of grazing eyes in their mention in the footnotes: Angela Davis, Lisa Marie Cacho, Martha Escobar, Beth Richie,

Mariame Kaba, Assata Shakur, Tenacious, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Spoon Jackson, Michelle Alexander, Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleave, Bryan Stevenson, Patty Berne, Sarah Haley, INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, adrienne maree brown, Andrea Ritchie, CeCe McDonald, Critical Resistance. Please spend time with them as you will. Their works brilliantly center the body in how it is abused and implicated within, and how it refuses and resists, violent systems. Following in their corporeal course, I wish to approach another body, the body that we often don't see in carceral discussions—the bodies of those of us who feel removed from incarceration.

With this chapter, rather, I am trying to offer a conceptualization of the prison system that moves deeper than surface, distant, compartmentizable discomfort. This is a practice in tracing the violence of the prison system through its bloodlines—in seeing how prisons exist in more intimate, enfleshed places. How prisons live in places that we can't close our eyes to because they're not apart from us; places that we don't choose to sit with, but that demand we feel the way they're already sitting in us.

Throughout this essay I generally want to avoid calling on occasional numbers and metonymic anecdotes, because of the type of disembodied engagement they can offer in discussions of violent practices. I want to keep our bodies engaged—which will mean sitting with more questions than handing out answers. However, with that said, I want to begin with one statistic, for it's probably the most oft-reiterated bite that begins to ground-shift our understanding of prisons—that *the United States has four percent of the world's population but one-fourth of the world's incarcerated peoples.*

Listen to your body's reaction. Queasiness? Do you feel unaffected, numb? A spine tingle? A stomach-drop? A lightness in your chest? A stillness in pace and place? No notable change in state?

Hearing this was the first kind of unsettling of gravity I remember feeling in the way I understood prisons. I'm interested in starting here because I'm intrigued by the ways in which our bodies enter and exit discussions of systemic and structural violence—discussions that are always already about bodies, as violence is always corporeal. In my experience, people often touch on their corporeal reactions to statistic or storied invitations into conversations of patterns of violence, but then where does the body go?<sup>2</sup> When do we stop talking about, and considering our bodies in these conversations? This paper centers our bodies in prisons—particularly for those of us who have never been incarcerated and have felt separate from the carceral system. Regardless of our difference in physical reaction to this statistic and prison discourse at large, but holding onto our own corporeal response as entry and implication I am asking: how are our bodies, always already, woven into prisons?

### Prison and Hegemony.

Many people have developed frameworks to talk about how prisons are more than just physical structures and procedures, but how the logics that uphold them and their presence are the very fabric of our contemporary society. One such framework is that of the “carceral state” or “prison nation.” From my understanding, this framework highlights the importance of the state, and state

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<sup>2</sup> In conversations on the prison nation—the violence of prisons and policing themselves and the violence that undergirds and interconnects our patterns of relationality with one another within a culture of imprisonment—the statistics, the stories, the imagined world we've thought we've known unraveling often shakes us. My stomach drops. I am drawn to stillness, I feel myself physically contort and try to shrink into myself in how I'm sitting or standing. I think this has much to do with my whiteness, ability and propertiedness and the way an abolitionist framework destabilizes my position, power and movement throughout the world as I've known it. I feel that often within myself these physical sensations make me want to leave the conversation, or turn it into a theoretically-jargonny space, rather than really stay present in my body and work within my sense of dislocation to build new patterns of knowing and feeling myself, new geographies, within an ever re-imagined world.

power, in prisons. It centers order and the status quo within the U.S. and understands prisons as foundational to seeing how the U.S. state manages its people and pursues its project of “freedom.” Heather Schoenfeld writes,

“The carceral state refers to the network of people and institutions responsible for ‘mass social control,’ including the police, courts, jails/prisons, probation, and parole, but also other technologies such as legal financial obligations (fines, fees, and restitution orders) and other types of community sanctions (from criminal and sometimes noncriminal behavior)” (2018: 6).

Richie, offers, “A prison nation refers to those dimensions of civil society that use the power of law, public policy, and institutional practices in strategic ways to advance hegemonic values and to overpower efforts by individuals and groups that challenge the status quo” (2012:3).

Another commonly used term is the “Prison Industrial Complex” (Davis 2003:84). This term is used to refer to the relationship between the flow of bodies through prison structures and the seat of profit in ideologies that build these structures. Using the word “complex” illustrates the interconnection between various structures and logics at play, evoking a relationship between capitalism, the government, its military and other institutions, and prisons.

A term that offers a similar lens on the contemporary carceral system, but one that I tend to prefer for its critical deconstruction of state projects into logics that run deeper than statehood itself and its implication of the body, is that of the “prison regime.” This framework goes beyond borders to see how this social fabric, even at a more fibrous level below the state, is made of a logic of division, power and control. The word “regime” itself, for me, evokes a sense of corporeality, of deep entrenchment in our bodies, of a logic that has seeped into our skin. This is why I gravitate towards this term. Sarah Haley leans on Dylan Rodriguez to explain,

“the prison as a regime[:.] ‘a dynamic state-mediated practice of domination and control, rather than a reified “institution” or “apparatus.”’ Carcerality was a practice and, often, a performance. At the core of this conception of prison as regime is the understanding that it generates ‘a technology of domination that exceeds the narrow boundaries of the same juridical-carceral structure.’ The parameters of subjugation technologized through the carceral state reached far beyond ‘its announced material boundaries and juridical limits,’ instead structuring and constituting the state writ large through a regime of neoslavery” (2016:9).

This term centers practice, and carcerality as a practice of violence that constitutes the very fabric of the world we live in; prisons serve to normalize the violence we see in spectacular and mundane forms under contemporary systems of power. Social theorists Sarah Haley and Martha Escobar delineate how the carceral system is built upon the bodies of women of color in particular (2016:6; 2016:5). They center the bodies of women of color in a deconstruction of the prison regime, citing both the regime's active physical disabling and harm against women of color's bodies, and the use of women of color's bodies in prison to simultaneously (re)create the ideological violence against them, as the project of prisons rests upon their dehumanization. In a similar vein and in the hopes of continuing this critical, deconstructive, questioning rhythm as these theorists, I will ruminate now on the logic that I see as undergirding this prison regime, following its arteries and capillaries through our society and our very flesh.

Prisons exist to uphold hegemony. Prisons' roots are in, and effects serve, white supremacy, cisheteropatriarchy and settler colonial capitalism—hegemony, and the hegemonic body (Vitale 2017; Bean 2018; Escobar 2016; Cacho 2012). Their logic, or the rationale we have taken that makes them seem ahistorical, natural, and unchangeable, is a logic we have been presented that serves hegemony. Prisons exist to reproduce and reaffirm the power of the hegemonic class. Vitale claims, “American police [and prisons] function... as a tool for managing deeply entrenched inequalities in a way that systematically produces injustices for the poor, socially marginal, and nonwhite” (2017:28). Prisons are crucial to the social reproduction of hegemony, they are an instrumental cog in the cycle of maintaining power relations.

Incarceration, through its tangible effects and underlying sentiments, is a tool of the hegemonic class to suppress dissent. Through the maintenance of an “excusably” exploited class of workers and a class of people eager to work but without access, enough sense of competition

is maintained between low-wage workers for fear of losing their jobs that there are diminished chances of organizing against poor conditions and pay. By putting people in prison, too, many of whom are people grossly abused by the status quo, the hegemonic class reduces chances of rebellion by interrupting many potential exchanges and relationships of radical collectivization. And finally, through a system which maintains sovereignty over societally blindly-accepted understandings of morality, deservingness, and humanhood (the flexibility and abuse of the term criminal to justify maltreatment of whatever group the hegemonic class cares to abuse), we are taught to quietly accept the dehumanization of population after population, and the abuse of people after people.

And finally, through their normalization of hegemonic violence, the carceral system limits our collective imagination of what can or could be. Jackie Wang puts it poetically,

“I would say that prison is an accurate name for our contemporary culture...the moments in which prisons became a dominant feature of the U.S., our imaginations (for all, not just those of us disproportionately imprisoned) also became imprisoned. The way we imagine work, our relationships, the future, family, everything, is locked down” (2018:315-316).

Through normalizing a site of immense violence, we work at normalizing all violence. When we are taught to think some people deserve pain and poor treatment, it is easy to extend that logic to others. Prisons and their justifications limit our imaginations in this way. By making us think prisons are natural, carceral rhetoric tells us that the world will always be violent and divided, and some people’s livelihood will always depend on some people suffering in silence.

### Carceral Logic.

The life-blood of hegemony is carceral logic (Stanley 2015). This logic is everywhere in contemporary U.S. society. It is the logic that justifies and naturalizes prisons, justifying and naturalizing violence of all forms. Hegemony maintains itself through a clouding, or a steeping. We are not conscious of the ways we are doused in prisons or how we have been insipidly taught

to uphold them through our thoughts and practices. Simply through being surrounded by this logic in our quotidian lives—in political rhetoric, storytelling, schooling, the workplace, the law, the home, architecture, the street, the media, jokes and commonly iterated phrases, art, the structuring of time and space—it permeates our politics, our skins. The way I conceive of carceral logic is:

Understanding *violence as inevitable, as natural*. This is not that every act of violence is bound to occur in the way it does, but believing that human nature is violent and violence will always be a driving force of living bodies (Aydin et al. 2016:405). I see this understanding as coming from a belief that *life is a zero-sum game, that competition is the natural rhythm*. In order to think violence will reign in any future, we have to believe that living is, at its roots, a competition between people, and people and nature, to stay alive—that as one wins, one loses; as one lives, one dies. Belying this belief is the understanding that *othering is a necessary* and natural part of survival. Arising from a space where *borders are seen as implicit*, there appear to be inherent divides among people, we assume born of reason. These borders delineate for us who we compete against and who we compete with, where violence is justified or made unseen and where we can discontinue feeling and connection. The making of fertile ground for all of this logic is a sense that *life is calculable*, or a *grounding in rationality*. In demystifying the world, our bodies, and the relationships that connect us—in dissecting them, writing them in numbers and toying with them rather than practicing listening and sitting with them, we learn that the world is rational. Life is a calculus—a game; a play of numbers, directions, structure and answers. There is a beginning and an end, a one versus the other, an order that is natural. Living becomes a means to an end, a getting something out of rather than being in; being apart from rather than being a part of. All is countable—care, space, time and love are finite, to be predicted, expected,

manipulated, used. There is no magic. There are no questions. Walking, holding, hearing and dancing are considered in terms of use, not taken as what is. Joy is experienced in fixed ways. Love is not radical. The texture of touch is not the texture of tenderness. There is no texture to touch. There is little texture. Even less touch. A talking to not listening with, a mimicked race rather than a felt pace.

This carceral logic textures our world. Steeped in it, it dulls our very senses, shapes what we perceive, how we act and understand. It normalizes the hegemonic world. Makes the hegemonic world our world. A timeless world. An unchanging world. The world.

But this isn't the only world.

I see this logic as permeating the skin, or the fabric, of our lives in the U.S. I see it in our language, science, art, architecture, dancing, children's stories, dreams, media, academia, workplaces, religions, homes, sports, romantic relationships, state and institutions, play, sex, friendships, hopes, body language, music, fears, loving. I imagine the texture of this logic as seeping and flowing through these sites in our lives and where our bodies come in contact with its streams, showers, and soakings it surely touches us; subconsciously it traces our skins and shapes our movements, it becomes our skin's chemistry, inseparable but not unchangeable. Of course what we live in becomes us in some ways, but this is not to believe that it has to be this way—other logics can ooze in, massaging and molding our skins, making new worlds. As I see contemporary society however, this is the main logic, current, coloring our lenses, senses and movements.

It is in our cosmovision.<sup>3</sup> The carceral logic sculpts our conception of our bodies, our lives, the world, the universe, their connection and purpose. To see living as a competition and

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<sup>3</sup> The word "cosmovisión" is used to describe the ways groups of people situate themselves within their bodies, physical and social surroundings, within nature and the cosmos through time--how people's practices and patterns



violence as part of the natural order is to color what we see, what we are willing to see, and how that affects what we do. It is to understand the world in a fixed way, a way where violence and punishment make sense, are logical, where harm cannot be curtailed and where love as a power is relegated to the genre of fantasy. This forms how we understand ourselves and our bodies. Even more deeply, delicately, the carceral logic crafts the phrases that write our bodies. We often believe things about ourselves, our actions, and our relationships to be innate—their survival depending on competition, and reject symbiotic understandings. Our livelihood is seen against that of others. In this vein, the carceral logic shapes too how we interact with and perceive others. In implicitly taking up the borders we are offered within ourselves, between ourselves and drawn between groups, we are scripting our bodies. Escobar writes, “Beyond its physical and formal presence, the border ideologically serves to construct and assign meaning to bodies” (2016:97). It tells us what and who is other, enabling and excusing the creation of artificial distance and disabling, social death and death itself, for as Toni Morrison writes, “Death is but the superlative example of what it means to live as an ‘Other,’ to exist beyond the border of a great ‘belonging.’” (2017:xv). The carceral logic scores our relationships, like Ruth Wilson Gilmore says, “Prison is not a building ‘over there’ but a set of relationships that undermine rather than stabilize everyday lives everywhere” (2007:242).

This logic, through its normalization of the status quo, outlines our relationships with systems of power and society at large. Assuming borders, competition and violence are natural, of course we feel largely numb to the presence of these divisions, relationships, and actions on a political and economic scale. Our own sense of value and emplacement is mapped through this logic, as “human value is made intelligible through racialized, sexualized, spatialized, and state-

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relate to their larger, relationally collective, holistic understandings of the workings of the universe (Vargas Montero 2016).

sanctioned violences” (Cacho 2012: 4). Our notions of place—of self within and throughout time and space, of meaning within this—are governed by a hegemonic, linear perception of time and motion, limiting the ways we can see the world weaving itself and our collective places of power. Understanding our rhythms and nature’s rhythms in terms of the standard clock, the business day, the calendar year is a rationalization of the magical, a dissociation from the embodied present and possible futurities (Goldman 2010:49). It is taking what is as what is always, without noting what also is, what can be, what could be. On being present and resisting a displaced calculus, Danielle Goldman writes, ‘Rhythm as a way of structuring time is also a way of seeing and experiencing reality—it is constitutive of consciousness, not as an abstraction but as a physical force affecting all the organs of the body’” (2010:49-50). To think in terms of rhythm might offer us a strategy of emplacement in the present.

Hegemony is woven together through interconnected violences—the fabric of which gets its strength from the carceral logic. I understand the violence in the world as all interconnected—driven by this same logic that within us tells us the world is a space of competition and for some to live others must die, for some to breathe we must pollute the air for others, some are deserving and others are not etc. This logic that divides us and strips the magic of connection and intercorporeality from the world justifies, normalizes, and incentivizes violence of all forms. We can see this logic everywhere there is violence. There is an “Unintelligibility of the boundaries between state and interpersonal forms of violence” (Escobar 2016:99). Violence, when seen as natural, becomes just a part of life personally, interpersonally, structurally and systemically. In different ways and scales all of these are patterns of othering, problems of calculus; “in the United States, freedom is a prison” (Kyodo Williams, Owens, and Syedullah 2016:181). Living, and what life is for, in the language of the state, only becomes possible then on the social death

of some. The carceral logic is so embedded in us that prisons are not only staples in our society and our imaginations, but the U.S. culture, its “freedom,” and ourselves become prisons. We are all imprisoned and policed in a way by this carceral logic’s hold on us—

“The police force is the state institution carrying out a specific mandate. The mandate expresses an energetic need of the construct that we inhabit. That mandate is to control Black bodies. The need is to have the constant specter of the other. When the other exists, it strengthens your need to belong. Your belonging is necessary for compliance. Your compliance maintains the system. You are policed, too. You are policed by your need for belonging. Your need for belonging requires control of the other... Or at least the illusion of it. You are policed through the control of my body. You are policed, too” (Kyodo Williams, Owens, and Syedullah 2016:xxvi).

In this way, the normalization of prisons normalizes all violence and serves as the ideological basis for its excuse. I walk with Kyodo Williams in expanding this sentiment to the dehumanizing of any peoples being possible within the framework and language and upon the bodies of people in prison. The carceral logic and hegemony itself relies on the “squeezing, holding up, cutting, opening, or confining [of] bodies...displayed in fantastical showcases...This machinery transforms individual bodies into a body politic” (Certeau 1984:141-142). The law and its carceral logic serve as algorithms, manipulating bodies as if they were numbers, abusing whatever bodies,  $x$ , necessary such that the hegemonic body,  $f(x)$ , maintains its power and monopolized illusion of humanness.

With the conversation between hegemony and habitus from chapter one, it feels understandable to locate this hegemonic carceral logic within the body, particularly within the hegemonic body. The prison regime clearly shows us how the mobility and freedom of the hegemonic body seems to rely upon the restricted mobility and freedom of millions of bodies of color, women, trans, queer, disabled, young, and working-class bodies. I entirely hold this to be true—that the category of humanity (its corporeal autonomy, mobility, and freedom) has been defined upon the bodies, personhoods, and labor of those it demonizes, and that the privileges that the hegemonic body most certainly lives within are the direct product of generations of

brutal violence. I also feel that this freedom cannot be a true freedom, a freedom that acknowledges, respects, and celebrates wholeness of body and mind and movement. I center the hegemonic body here to offer a vision of the prison regime that holds at its ground an understanding of violence as interconnected, of liberation as intertwined. A freedom constructed upon carceral logic will always be entrapped. I have heard, in various iterations, “masculinity is a prison,” “whiteness is a prison,” and “capitalism is a prison”—how do the systems of power that reserve humanness for one body, largely through prisons and their logic, simultaneously make such bodies prisons themselves?<sup>4</sup>

### Embodied Carceral Logic.

Through habitus, understandings are embodied and shape future embodiments and future understandings. The body helps normalize and atemporalize these logics and prisons themselves. When we see calculus, artificial distance, othering, etc in ourselves we think it is natural and not to be contested in the world. We see it as unchangeable—as without past, present and future. But the body is being used as a tool of hegemony in this way. All of our bodies are written on by and through, in some spheres, the state, the law, and the carceral logic. Reverend angel Kyodo Williams claims, “Our bodies take the shape of, and thus illuminate, the contours of the most insidious force of systematic dehumanization and destruction ever imagined, one which has led the global community into a downward spiral of self-annihilation” (2016:xxi). With violence normalized as a quotidian rhythm of course our very bodies are informed by it, and begin to reproduce violence, taking its shape as our own. We should ruminate on how our bodies can also be doing, saying, searching and mystifying other ways of being that counter this logic. How are our bodies sites of love, connection and possibility?

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<sup>4</sup> The body is a crucial site where the carceral logic is felt, reproduced and passed along. This means it is also a site for potential disruption and the creation and feeding of alternatives!

The carceral logic is embodied. Understanding violence as natural means a lack of intimacy. Perceived competition produces a fear of other bodies, our own, and nature, that makes intimacy intangible. Our bodies become understood as weapons and threats, in terms of numbers, as means of and tools for war rather than potential sites of affection and care. Our violence against the environment becomes an issue of bodies, of “population,” rather than the work of death-waging systems of oppression. Othering is transcribed in a rejection of the intercorporeal. Connection between bodies is painted as fiction, demonized as “witchcraft,” delegitimized by the rational scientific world. Where rationality reigns the unknown becomes fear-producing: strangers are danger, not comrades, not part of collectives, not sources and sites of life. Bodies are seen as extra to one another, connection not necessary for living, ourselves not comprised of our relationships. The symbiosis and balance of the world is forgotten, unwritten. To feel borders as implicit is to see skin as an official boundary and not a permeable layer in conversation with that in which it exists. To feel borders as implicit is to embody a mind/body split. To understand oneself as a mind or soul trapped within a body, one’s body being a tool or prison, not one’s self. To feel that life is calculable is a death of corporeal wonder and magic. It is to relegate our bodies to rulers and ruling, to conquer them and control them, to not listen and be with them in the present. This conception of the body has roots back in Christian Theological Monastic fundamentals and the confounding of body and discipline, the articulation of corporeal practice and gesture as part of a “vocabulary of duty” designed to reorganize emotion and practice around obedience to God (Asad 1993:138,134). As Wendell Berry writes,

“By dividing body and soul, we divide both from all else. We thus condemn ourselves to a loneliness for which the only compensation is violence—against other creatures, against the earth, against ourselves...The willingness to abuse other bodies is the willingness to abuse one’s own. To damage the earth is to damage your children. To despise the ground it to despise its fruit; to despise the fruit is to despise its eaters” (Curtin 1999:266).

Being immersed in this logic we are all taught to consider our bodies in this way. Think of our bodies like sponges. They are porous. Or as the air, as water. We soak up, in. We are all affected in some way by our surroundings, physically and ideologically. We are taught to mimic this body-composition and relationship rewarded in contemporary hegemonic culture—capitalism, cisheteropatriarchy and white supremacy, this network of systems thrives on our dissociation from our bodies. Of course identity and socialization, time and space and power all play huge roles in how our bodies exist and we understand and occupy them. Clearly as these systems all only benefit one hegemonic body, they can only be rewarded to the level we mimic and impersonate that body (Leeds Craig 2014:116). Only people read as the white, cis-hetero, able-bodied, propertied man, will receive the “benefits” of these systems—wealth, “safety and security,” access to build a life on others’ suffering, unquestioned humanity. Those of us who aren’t entirely this body, but who are physically proximate or can impersonate it—like myself as a cis-hetero, white, propertied, able-bodied, woman with relationships to many hegemonic men and practice navigating spaces with this cultural currency—I have access to many of these benefits. This impersonation however, is not possible or desired in many ways and to many degrees for many people.

There is no singular, true hegemonic man, no “human” in the order of systems of oppression. The hegemonic man is imagined (Certeau 1984:100-101), and as we are dehumanized through the practice of dehumanization, in our core no body can every fully be such a “human.” The hegemonic human is atemporal—he is changeless, fixed, was never a child and will never die. No breathing body, therefore, can truly be this man—he is a fabrication. I believe, that in addition to all the ways that many of us are consciously aware of the need to resist this world and build anew within its cracks, on a cellular level, our bodies know more than

we do—even those of us who receive the privileges of this fabric of violence. Cells only know themselves in relationship to one another. At the deepest physical level, our very physical being resists division and builds and works to heal itself. The body in some way, pulse, rhythm, or movement (consciously or subconsciously) rebels from the death in and of the carceral logic. I don't think that the hegemonic body can lead revolution, like Freire (2000), but I do think it's important for those of us with systemic power to problematize the most intimate aspects of our lives as part of understanding our places in the present and imagining other, more humanizing, futures.

There is always resistance. I think often people will reject this carceral embodiment in part and rebel against it (to me, logics are not all consuming, there is always the breath to return to) but of course it affects us. Also, while systems of oppression clearly give material, and more advantages and rewards to the hegemonic body and are actively destroying, dismembering and disabling the bodies of everyone else, we must remember that they ultimately dehumanize all of us (because we are dehumanized in the dehumanization of others). The body rebels.

As an abolitionist and dancer my approach to sociology takes seriously how bodies are trained to move, or what might be seen as choreographies of power in the everyday. As I have attempted to say, I wholeheartedly believe that none of us are separate from the prison regime—that its logic and motions are embedded in our daily movements and embodied interactions. While we may think we are walling out only some people through the brick and mortar or prisons, the mindset and bodily practice that allows us to think so is really walling in the possibilities of our lives and walling out our imaginations of what could be. The prison regime choreographs our movement, such that the hegemonic body feels free upon the unfreedom of others—can move with the restriction of movement of bodies of color, women, trans, and queer

people, the disabled, the young, and the working-class. The hegemonic body feels free in the prison nation, but what is free within a rehearsed series of movement and ideological phrases that we can't imagine past or through?

I believe that the cartographies of containment of the carceral logic—the mappings of our bodies and worlds that prescribe a politics of alienation, dissection, and disposability—means quite literally that our bodily habitus is trained to move in choreographies of unfreedom. This is why I turn to the the hegemonic body and how it is taught to embody the carceral logic. These hegemonic bodies are the very people who often, I would guess, feel the most separate from any discourse, sentiment, or need to consider or dismantle prisons. They might feel unaffected, separate. I want to offer a conceptualization of just how intimately I think all bodies, and the hegemonic body in particular is connected to the prison regime. The purpose of this attention to the hegemonic body is to push those of us with bodies of or similar to the hegemonic body to consider, question, and feel the ways in which our bodies are implicated in, and are a potential place of resistance to, the power structures we often benefit from (but which ultimately dehumanize us, too).

I want to question how the carceral logic choreographs our movements such that even those of us who hold the illusion of freedom are contained and cut-off from imagining other worlds. I sit with the movements of the hegemonic body in the form of the white, cis-hetero, able-bodied, propertied, boy to always remember that possibility is at the seed of motion. In young people we can often more clearly feel the weight that repeated motions hold on the shape of their bodies and lives, and I believe we also hold a sense of possibility in young people that we forget for ourselves through repetitive practice that comes to be seen as second-nature. Through spending time thinking about boys' movements I hope to offer a sense of beautiful



tension to you readers. There is much weight in the repetition of motions, in the choreography of power, but there also ceaselessly lives possibility, space for fugitive improvisation and the power to create alternative truant choreographies.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Here I lean on two tools for conceptualizing freedom articulated by Sarah Haley (*fugitivity*; 2016) and Stephanie Camp (*truancy*; 2004), both of which are originally used in handling with care the histories and narratives of enslaved black bodies. So I ask you to be mindful of the intent for their creation, and lean on these terms as tools to remember that freedom is always in conversation. I understand hidden spaces within choreographies of movement as living multiplicity. As time- and space-bending contradictions of enacting life-affirming, interconnected practices in spaces mediated by carceral logics. I think of this as science fiction—of building the world we want in the world we have, a space that is noncontiguous with the practices of othering we see around ourselves, that makes and performs the future in the present by drawing from technologies of resistance in the past. These hidden spaces are taken, not given, like the freedom Joy James articulates (2005). They are physical spaces—stealing away at night or dance halls, and they are speculative communities—reimaginings of our connections to one another, queer and trans ethics of accountability that are creating and defining new freedoms not predicated on carceral logics. We can think of occupying, moving in these hidden spaces as fugitivity, like the stealing away that Sarah Haley historicizes in the abolitionist geographies of young black girls in 19th century southern U.S. (2016). We can also think of these hidden spaces as potential places and times within the geographies of containment we already live within—as truant spaces, or simultaneous alternative geographies, as Stephanie Camp pulls on (2004). Truancy is a radical reinventing of the spaces we occupy, a form of navigation and pattern of movement throughout the spaces we are in that doesn't require leaving them altogether. To move truantly is to practice a counter-orientation in the geographies of containment one lives in—to move towards freedom through physical hidden spaces like dance floors, to improvise in building relationality in spaces like testimonios and time-sharing, to embody practices of interdependency through deconstructing carceral logics in our patterns and trying to practice queer and trans ethics of accountability.

### Chapter Three:

#### The Dance.

##### On Violence.

To deconstruct the carceral logic—to lean into its cracks and see what flows there—we need to practice mapping it. Mapping allows us to see where we should listen, lean, and pour our energy, so as not to waste ourselves on changes that won’t affect genuine change to the carceral system. To trace the violent carceral logic means a tracing of violence itself. We want to look at the hegemonic body here, to question it and implicate it (and all of our bodies to the ways we wish to implicate them and see them in the hegemonic body). To listen to the hegemonic body is to look at the places we least expect to find the prison, to get to the root of the logic to begin to imagine (and listen to already existing) alternatives.

##### *Why talk about violence so sweepingly?*

To me, all violence is corporeal—practiced by, on, and through bodies. Regardless of form (physical, emotional, psychological), the effects of violence and the tools of violence are held by humans. In one way, violence is that which constrains the body through unwanted pressure. Constraining directly our bodily health, violence can be enacted physically through aggressive touch or weapons, through locking someone away without ability to exercise and eat and commune with people in an enriching, living way, the wake of slavery in structural white supremacy and capitalist cartographies that use poverty to entrap poor communities of color in locations and lands that are being structurally abused by capitalist “progress” through pollution and contamination and destruction that harms the bodies of communities of color over and through generations. Regardless of what form the harm done upon a body takes, “violence that hits human beings as a *direct* result of...actions of others, and violence that hits them *indirectly*

because of repressive structures...are upheld by the summated and concerted action of human beings” (Galtung 1969:178). Violence is that which harms bodies, and is always rooted in bodies as well.

Violence, in its plethora of forms, all comes from the same dynamics of power and alienation; it is interconnected. Violence is often discussed as having four forms: personal, interpersonal, structural, and systemic. Personal violence is within and onto oneself, interpersonal is between two or more physical bodies directly onto one another, structural violence is violence that appears to not have a subject behind it but that is reinforced and churned out through existing measures and laws and forms of living, and systemic violence is the violence of intertwined systems of oppression such as white supremacy, the cisheteropatriarchy, and able-bodied capitalism—a violence that is understood as part of the grain of our daily diet, that regardless of form or situation, societally devalues and degrades and aims to deteriorate the bodies and lives of people of color, women, non-binary, and trans people, queer people, disabled people and poor people. These violences create the shadows of each other—excusing and giving rise to each other through their reiterations. Each of these violences comes from the same carceral logic (not that it begins in or comes from prisons, but that the prison exists as a spectacular form of its lifeforce). These violences are muddy; inseparable from one another, dependent on each other for their justification and normalization—for their future. The black feminist theorists and activists from INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence beautifully stir this together:

“INCITE! Maintains that these forms of violence are co-constitutive, meaning that they develop relationally and make each other possible. Central to making bodies vulnerable to these material forms of violence is the ideological (cultural) labor that constructs and naturalizes social inequalities. Thus, in defining violence, I also include the ideological labor that naturalizes unequal power relations.” (Escobar 2016:20)

This logic and imaginary (texture of realities and rhythm of futurity), or ideological labor, is what I refer to as the carceral logic. Black feminist theorist Beth Richie calls this the “violence matrix” (2012:133)—the weaving of violences that creates a fabric, a holding on, of our contemporary reality and “justifies” prisons.

### Unweaving the Carceral Fabric.

Please try to be generous with me in this chapter,

Before moving into the middle school dance, I want to be clear about why I choose to pull these strings. I am deliberately picking something that seems completely trivial and mundane (the dance) to illustrate how deeply ingrained the carceral logic is in everything we do. I am certainly not trying to conflate the sites of the dance and the prison—I believe that that would dishonestly minimize the very real atrocity of the carceral system and itself be a harmful act towards the peoples this vicious system has and is hurting and us all, for we all deserve to know the truth of the life of this system and the ways it lives within our own. I work here with the dance as simply one site to practice unweaving the carceral fabric of the contemporary U.S.

I wish to now couch this chapter, and my choice in deconstructing the prison through the middle school dance, in a conversation on the mundane and spectacular. Both prisons and their carceral logic, and the middle school dance are seemingly exceptional and mundane sites within our quotidian lives. Prisons seem exceptional—they stand out to us. Prisons rely on and are a form of clear violence. There is no sincere effort to hide this. We know the numbers and see the tv shows. Prisons are the only place of their kind that get a monopoly on state violence—justified violence within the borders of the state on “our own” people (Gonzalez van Cleave 2016:189; Gilligan 1996:141). The power of the police and prisons rests on their “justified” use of violence. When we really consider this violence in motion with other forms and practices of violence, it

should become terrifying in its proportion and the degree to which we've accepted it as normal, as simply the terms upon which our own lives rest.

In this sense, prisons and their logic are also mundane. Despite our shared understanding of their actions and severity, why do we have such a hard time questioning and rejecting prisons for their violence? I believe that this lays in the way the carceral logic is embedded within our lives, cosmovision, patterns and rhythms at every level, from practices of eating to communication in relationships to outlooks on political possibilities. The logic of carcerality is so ingrained that it appears to be natural. Thus, a rejection of such explicit violence as the prison regime would demand a rejection of the quiet violences of our daily living, and that is a big task to ask of ourselves and each other. Therefore, the prison regime is able to continue its disgusting, visible monopoly on violence and it appears to us as mundane, nothing to be questioned or out of the ordinary. Prisons are mundane—they blend into the fabric of our lives, mostly go unchallenged and unconsidered. When we know how awful they are, why is it still so hard for us to get on board with prison abolition? To say OK clearly prisons are heinous. Let's do something else. The carceral logic is all around us, we are steeped in it. It is our world, our politics, our relationships, ourselves, our bodies. To reject prisons is to reject a core part of ourselves. It seems unnatural to reject prisons because it means rejecting something we feel within our very bodies. This is the trick of hegemony, this is where the habitual concretizing of hegemony is powerful. Through constant repetition, systems of power and oppression—hegemony—becomes naturalized and we find it impossible, silly, to no avail to fight it.

The middle school dance is similarly a site that seems simultaneously exceptional and mundane. I am not saying here that the dynamics of a middle school dance cause prisons or single-handedly uphold such a system, or even that they are implicitly violent. I am just using the

middle school dance as a site of tracing the heartbeat of the prison in our under-scrutinized lives. The middle school dance is interesting in its ability to give many of us visceral reactions of discomfort, and bring us to awkward laughter upon its reflection countless years later. Middle school dances are awkward. They often leave us feeling unsettled, but this unsettling is hardly given consideration. Middle school dances are also incredibly banal—we tend not to look into them or dwell on them, even though they leave us with such a particular sensation of queasiness. I want to lean into this urge to laugh and move on, and sit there instead. Why do middle school dances, and particularly the enactment of hegemonic white masculinity in these spaces, linger in our bodies and where might we see threads of the carceral logic in their embodiment?

*Okay, but why dance?*

I want to take a moment here to comment on why I am choosing a dance as a site in this conversation in particular. Dance, and bodies more generally, are often disregarded in academic conversations because academics is a field built entirely upon the assumptions of rationality, intellect, and emotional control that create the category of hegemonic white masculinity against the degradation of the bodies of others (Leeds Craig 2014:4). Academia has been held as a sphere of bodiless brains. It has been a tool and weapon of hegemonic white masculinity to legitimize, indoctrinate, and further violent practices of colonization, anti-blackness, and patriarchal violence. So of course the body is missing in academia. But I wish to center the body in this work because the body is always there, even when we claim to write it out. The body, and dance, is a critical site through which categories of people, relations of dominance and power, and practices of violence are inscribed and reiterated, and as such I wish to look at the hegemonic body and how it makes itself in spaces of dance through its general lack of participation.

Identities become embodied even though they are not innate (Leeds Craig 2014:7). We acquire patterns of movement that are shaped by other people's understandings of our identities and how our bodies should pattern such identities. Identities are formed and enacted in part through corporeal stance and movement patterns, just as the violence legitimized in those identities becomes naturalized or normalized through patterns (Leeds Craig 2014:164). Maxine Leeds Craig troubles our normalized assertion that white boys don't or can't dance:

“the new common sense appears to conform to a larger logic of a racial, gender, and sexual order in which the white heterosexual All-American boy should not dance. That boy will grow up to be a man who wants sex with women but is not sexy, a rational man whose public touching of others is limited to firm handshakes and hearty pats on the back. Once different capacities become embodied, socially produced differences appear to have arisen, naturally, from our bodies. They appear to exist timelessly, outside of history” (2014:188).

Leeds Craig then beautifully elaborates,

“all of us have bodies and minds. Neither race, nor gender, nor the intersection of the two, should be used to sort us into the passionate and the rational. Therefore the belief that white men cannot dance is not an innocent truism. It is no less harmful than a belief that black and Latino blood is hot. These clichés have everything to do with how we imagine what a governor looks like, whose body welcomes uninvited touch, and who appears to be made for a jail cell” (2014:185).

Areas of the power ascribed to our identities are written into their physical stance—white boys are taught, through mirroring, a certain way of holding their bodies, relating to their bodies, and moving their bodies that reaffirms their position and dominance. In this way, the carceral logic becomes inscribed into our very patterns of movement and being. Leeds Craig explains, “Practicing some activities and avoiding others, boys remake their bodies” (2014:188). Our imaginary, or the way the world seems (including our interpretation of common sense), molds the forms of our bodies—seeing people that look like me move a certain way shows me how to move my body, and the ways that I move my body exist within a socio-spatial world wherein body movements are always already playing parts in power dynamics. As a white able-bodied woman, I am taught to move freely and with an open chest, and large spread of motion, as the world appears an extension of my whiteness, I am also taught to lead with my chest and pelvis in

certain scenarios as this will grant me social power but also to monitor these areas especially so they won't be seen as an invitation. I will look at the middle school dance as a site where identities, and the potentially violent power implications they carry, are practiced by looking particularly at the hegemonic body in these spaces from my memory.

The middle school dance I am considering comes from my own recollections of such dances I attended. This is not meant to represent more than my own personal experience, but rather be seen as one theoretical exercise of deconstruction within my own life; consider and reflect upon it to the degree you wish.

What I hope to do...

To deconstruct is to trace; to sit with and to walk with a notion, to see its veins in place and time and to map the heart of the idea in the pulse of the banal (Derrida 2014:23). I am holding the embodiment practiced by this hegemonic body at the middle school dance as a technology of violence. Kelly Oliver uses the term "technologies" (2013) to articulate methods, channels, or practices that enact or perpetuate the logic of violence we are addressing. Just as the exception constitutes the rule (as Zoë Bracken said in conversation on February 08, 2019, all streams flow into the other, all bodies of water are polluted), the forms of life that the carceral logic offers and enables work in tandem with the practices of violence and death that offer some people life only upon the death and disabling of others. Looking particularly towards race, Joseph Pugliese notes that "White supremacy is a priori the exercise of violence through the diffuse iteration of everyday practices that, precisely because of their quotidian status, render the violence unrepresentable to everyone but its targets" (2013:79). Guided by this righteous belief in the banal as a site and source of structuring violence, and with the aim of furthering the consideration of ourselves within a world of violence that lives upon "death-worlds" so as to



work at destabilizing violent logics’ hold on our practices and futures, I will here attempt a deconstruction of the middle school dance as a mundane yet exceptional site of the carceral logic that underpins the prison regime (Oliver 2013:17-18). The performance of a deconstruction of structured, sanctioned violence is done to recognize “our own psychic [and libidinal] investments in state-sanctioned violence, killing, and war” (Oliver 2013:215). It is “Deconstructive thinking [that] forces us to slow down and think about the customs and rules that we commonly accept,” (Oliver 2013:11) the patterns that structure and give rhythm to our lives, that exist as part of this scaffolding of violence.

My intentions here are in offering, not selling. They are humble. I am not trying to say that any relationships between the prison and the dance are causal. I want instead to offer this as an exercise of questioning the mundane, the intimate—that which we often would prefer to ignore, but which is necessary to deconstruct in deconstructing prisons everywhere. I ask you to listen to the fractal patterns of movement, violence, and resistance here. A true challenge runs flesh deep.

### **The Middle School Dance.**

#### Place.

##### The movement

At the middle school dance, the cis-hetero, able-bodied, propertied, white boy—the hegemonic body—generally occupies the periphery or stands as the comical centerpoint of the dance space. Hegemonic boys form a circle, with their bodies delineating the space within which other bodies will dance, within their gaze but from which place they themselves cannot become the objects of another’s gaze. As “heteronormative codes script interactions on the dance floor” (Leeds Craig 2014:124), “the uncertainty regarding whether dance communicates sex, sexiness, or sexuality makes public dance performance risky for men...dance’s connection with sexiness can place a

man in the position of being an erotic object” (Leeds Craig 2014:105). In order to not be objectified, the hegemonic boy must place himself beyond the full view of the other dancers, himself becoming the wall, the background, the blankness and “normal” against which other identities are defined and in whose opposition this hegemonic body grounds itself as the baseline. His whiteness rests on his witnessing and inscription of their blackness, his masculinity opposes their femininity, his ability comes from their disablement—he is made of their othering from his gaze. Thus, it would be dangerous for him to occupy a position where he could potentially be witnessed as anything aside from what is and will always be there, what is not ascribable—he sticks to the periphery, embodying his power. He also sometimes dances in the center as a spectacle, usually dancing comically. This is not compromising his authority, for in dancing comically he is articulating his power over his own body, the relationship of himself as mind having dominion over his body as tool. In these cases it is visible then that he commands his body and the scene, he chooses when to his body is viewed, but because he maintains control of viewing he is never viewed as his body. Leeds Craig notes that “within the United States self-containment, bodily inexpressiveness, and the maintenance of physical distance have been dominant forms of masculine embodiment” (2014:154).

It is not inconsequential where certain bodies tend to position themselves in space—

“There is no space, in a hierarchical society, which is not hierarchized and which does not express social hierarchies and distances in a more or less distorted or euphemized fashion, especially through the *effect of naturalization* attendant on the durable inscription of social realities onto and in the physical world: differences produced by social logic can then seem to arise out of the nature of things” (Bourdieu 1995:13).

This effect of naturalization occurs through repeated “position takings,” or habitus (Bourdieu 1995:14)—

“the progressive inscription into bodies of the structures of the social order is perhaps accomplished, for the most part, *via moves and movements of the body, via the bodily poses and postures* that these social structures reconverted into physical structures—organize and qualify

socially as in rise or decline, entry (inclusion) or exit (exclusion), bringing together or distancing in relation to central and valued site” (Bourdieu 1995:16).

We must consider the spatial patterns of bodies, including the hegemonic body at a middle school dance, because social space is the first and last reality (Bourdieu 1995:22). Our imaginations and understandings are made, make, and made again from physical space and standing. We must work there in order to challenge oppressive imaginations.

Sara Ahmed explains that “Spaces acquire the ‘skin’ of the bodies that inhabit them” (2006:132). In this way, the hegemonic body becomes invisible, or normal, as his whiteness is merely an extension of the world that has been contorted to his image. As space is assumed white, a continuation of the white body, blackness is made to be not at home. White supremacy is written into spatial formation and corporeal stance. Similarly the cisheteropatriarchy and able-bodied capitalism are embodied through practice. In her work *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed uses the notion of orientation (within a body, between bodies and in place and worldmaking) to frame the project of queering, or disrupting, hegemony and the power of the hegemonic body. She describes the power of identity as in part a practice of orientation—of placing one’s body in certain postures that imply or delimit certain actions, paths, and horizons. Habitual practice in movement and spatial occupation shapes power relations and influences how the reality of hegemony will continue to shape our lives.

#### The structure

The physical and logistical structure of prisons reflects the spatial orientation of the middle school dance. The way that the hegemonic body creates the border, or lines the periphery, mirrors the structure and concept of policing—that of surveillance. Harvey Young reflects on how “The black body...staged as a ‘criminal body’ by contemporary law enforcement and judicial systems, is a body that has been forced into the public spotlight and given a compulsory

visibility. It has been *made to be given to be seen*” (2010:12). This is the structure of the periphery—to look but not be seen (unless one chooses to be seen). In the police state, black bodies, brown bodies, queer bodies, women’s bodies, non-binary bodies, trans bodies, young and old bodies, disabled bodies, working class bodies are made to be given to be seen (while clearly in different ways and to different degrees). Only the hegemonic body reserves the continuity of himself to be one with the background—he simply is, he is not seen, he is not an object, he is the originary subject. When the hegemonic body places himself in the center of the dance space, he mimics the prison’s panopticonal structure. The prison guards in their looming presence, walking around or stationary in the center is hyper visible. But it is written in the implicit logic of the prison that the guard, officer and deputy choose to be there—the incarcerated person does not. The guard, officer, and deputy are understood to have agency, and therefore it is not their bodies that become them, but their minds, their character—they are not their bodies. Meanwhile, those who continue to be subjected to the gaze of the hegemonic men are being objectified without their consent. The hegemonic body at the middle school dance is learning the “microphysics... [the] subtle calculus of power” (Philo 2001:481) (subconsciously)—the same microphysics that operates to uphold prisons and legitimizes violence everywhere.

A similar spatial power dynamic is at play in the geographic distribution of the physical buildings of the carceral state. The courts are at the center, often in highly populated areas, city centers, and prisons are mostly scattered around rural U.S. (Huling 2002). The courts, through their role in government as quasi-sovereign powerholders, are not compromising themselves or objectifying themselves by being situated at the center of the dynamic. Instead, it seems as if those very people making decisions, instrumentalizing violence within these walls appear nameless to the general public, as their title (and thus “deservingness” of the power to impune)

violence) is what is noted. Prisons, on the other hand, are mostly relegated to the rural areas, where the incarcerated peoples are even further invisibilized from the public (and normalized further through the logic of “out of sight out of mind”) while the structural violence actively done against them each day drowns into the white noise of the periphery, assumed to be normal, simply the continuation of space and power as it is, not to be contested. Ruth Wilson Gilmore offers a critical position on this spatial orientation,

“Such breadth belies the common view that prisons sit on the edge—at the margins of social spaces, economic regions, political territories, and fights for rights. This apparent marginality is a trick of perspective, because, as every geographer knows, edges are also interfaces. For example, even while borders highlight the distinction between places, they also connect places into relationships with each other and with non-contiguous places. So too with prisons: the government-organized and -funded dispersal of marginalized people from urban to rural locations suggests both that problems stretch across space in a connected way and that arenas for activism are less segregated than they seem. Viewed this way, we can see how ‘prison’ is actually in the middle of the muddle that confronts all modestly educated working people and their extended communities—the global supermajority—at the dawn of the twenty-first century” (2007: 11).

The spatial configuration of power seems to be a trick of the eye—because while it seems that the spaces in between are outside of this “microphysics,” we are all still at the dance.

And finally, the space of the middle school dance is reflected within the courtroom itself. Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleave spent years holding space in Cook County Courthouse, the U.S.’s largest criminal court, observing the physical dynamics of the prison nation—what statistics don’t say about the corporeal truth of the criminal (in)justice system. Her book begins with the scene of her first meeting with a lawyer in his office in the courthouse. The lawyer, a white man, sat comfortably at his desk, laughing as he described the workings of the courthouse. Behind him, the walls were lined with photos of face after face of black and brown men—he had wallpapered his office with the mugshots of those people who he had helped send to prison, whose families he had helped break apart, whose bodies and lives he had violently disregarded. This image is how she starts her story, and the rest continues in this pictorial vein. What strikes me about this first image is how it directly mirrors the panopticonal dynamic we’ve been talking about—with

the hegemonic body in the center, surrounded by other bodies. But this image is the hyper-image. The hegemonic body here is the only person with agency in the room, and his power and agency within the context of this room come directly from the abuse of the people surrounding him—the rest of the people have been relegated to hyper-objectified status—in their only being photos, and the photos that were taken of them upon the loss of their structural agency. Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleave continues to note the “racial demarcation of space” (2016:39) throughout the courthouse—in the separate doors for those on trial and those with power to determine, in the demarcation of private versus public (which was entirely racialized in Chicago), in the separation of the public gallery from the “professional space” (often separated by bulletproof glass), in the performance of hegemonic masculinity by judges and lawyers for each other and the public as they carelessly determined the futures of black man after black man. In the courtroom, the defendant is the only person made to be their body—this body in such a moment is made to be the whole person, and others are given the power to decide such a person’s worth and future off of this corporeal moment. The other people in the deciding room—the judge, the lawyers, the jury—are all effectively nameless for their titles, they are filling in the roles of a game—the judge, the person with the highest power in the room, is draped in a cloak—this explicitly illustrates how although that cloak is covering the body—the body who will determine the near future of defendant—that the judge is not their body, they are a mind, they are the background, what is and what will be, what is “normal” to have and hold and exercise power, they are not to be seen as a body.

### Pelvis.

#### The movement

We have likely all heard that white men don’t or can’t dance. This comes in here. The hegemonic body at the middle school dance, when dancing, does so in a disembodied way—he

does not move his hips fluidly. Movement is kept to the goal-oriented limbs, while his core—his pelvis—is kept in check, so as not to invite the sexualization of his body by unknowable eyes. The sense of self these boys are in the game of conveying, is that of a body deserving of power, the normal subject—“[men who don’t dance] gain the right to claim the position and associated benefits of the normal, rational man. Drawn into accepting their places on the intellectual and unemotional side of a culturally perceived rift, they relinquish identification with and connection to the body to sexualized and racialized others” (Leeds Craig 2014:190). Not moving hips is crucial to this project because to use one’s hips is to be vulnerable in an economy of the gaze, to be witnessed as potential object. While in the prison regime the hegemonic body is granted the one-way power of surveillance, to exist within this carceral logic, this carceral world, the hegemonic body must also learn to surveil itself—no body is separate from this logic.

The project of othering, through the negation of white boys’ hips, is crucial to justifying the violence that undergirds the prison state as boys learn to disregard their own bodies and makes others only their bodies (Butler 1985:133). Boys learn through corporeal practice that

“white middle-class heterosexual masculinity is equated with a stolid, self-contained, non-sexualized, minimally expressive body. It is a body characterized by goal-oriented use of arms and legs that are attached to unmoving hips and torso. This form of embodiment occupies a position of dominance, which rests on a claim of normalcy, because of its distance from physically expressive and sensual [other]” (Leeds Craig 2014:116).

So it’s not an innocent truism. White men can dance. By saying they can’t, a normalization of their power and the hegemonic power structure is occurring (Leeds Craig 2014:185).

#### The structure

The physical rejection of the hips seen in the middle school dance is reflected in the logistical structure of the carceral state, where sexual repression is used as a tool of dehumanization. With the dehumanization of policing and incarceration, the sexual practices of people are surveilled and criminalized outside of prisons and ignored or violated within prisons (Richie 2017:144).

While people who are policed and incarcerated are seen as and for their bodies, they are simultaneously denied the full humanity of their bodies through their hyper sexing and desexing. Meanwhile, correctional officers and police, who are understood to be purely mind and agency, not seen for their bodies (who are clearly minding their bodies, just as the boys in the dance are) should be widely known for their sexual violence towards the people incarcerated at their facilities and the people they incarcerate (Richie 2017:104). This hyper sexing and desexing—the surveillance of the hips—is another example of how the rejection of the body in its wholeness (of both the hegemonic body and those it attempts to conquer, both the people incarcerated and those who incarcerate and monitor them) is a repression that only serves to exacerbate, ignore, and excuse violence.

### Touch.

#### The movement

At the middle school dance, touch by the hegemonic body is reserved for sexual movements on girls (initiated by him) or aggressive movements against boys. In this way, he maintains his distance and asserts his power. Grinding, or more like a disembodied humping, is the movement most frequently seen in these spaces. The hegemonic boy here approaches a girl, and holding her from behind (often by the belt loop or holding her hips) unrhythmically beats his pelvis against her butt. There is some slow dancing between boys and girls where the touch is not explicitly sexual, but it's characterized by comically uncomfortable distance between the bodies—the intimacy does not feel as natural as the disembodied sexual movement. Between boys there is not much touch, but when there is it's often in the form of moshing. Aside from these touches however, there is a jarring lack of touch by the hegemonic body. Through touch, boundaries come in to question, and therefore those who were so easily othered before, when shared by



touch, are not so easily seen as other. For the hegemonic body, whose project is othering, maintaining control over his patterns of touch, and minimizing touch that is not explicitly competitive, performative or sexual is crucial. We continue to say that white men can't dance, because once this power division has been practiced for so long, it's difficult to move (not to say it's not possible!)"—"dance is an intimate interactional practice, and it is this very quality that can make it difficult for men who have learned to limit public physical intimacy" (Leeds Craig 2014:9).<sup>6</sup>

#### The structure

The dehumanization of incarcerated peoples mirrors (though we should not at all conflate) the dehumanization of racialized, gendered projects in the dance (through forms of touch). I think that the sexual and aggressive or violent forms of touch I discussed earlier at the dance shouldn't be hard to conceptualize in terms of the prison state: from the sexual violence of police officers to corrections officers, police brutality, to the dividing of bodies from one another into metal boxes wherein touch is reserved for reprimand. I want to elaborate here on the project of not touching, and how that simultaneously dehumanizes the people abused by the carceral system and maintains the authority of the system itself. Through the architecture of jails and prisons, and the literal boxing off of people from one another so as not to be able to touch one another, as well as the choreography of visitation where touch is severely limited and monitored between loved ones, to the geography of where prisons are situated (often so far from families and loved ones that visitation is ridiculously difficult and thus infrequent, and communication and touch are close to severed altogether), and even the process of deciding who is captured by these systems (the judge and jury deciding, and the prosecutor arguing against, the future of the person on trial

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<sup>6</sup> Of course there is dancing that I am not talking about here, that defies all of this and goes in the face of these patterns—of course there is corporeal understanding and resistance to these power dynamics everywhere! That's beautiful! I am just not spending this paper talking about it—but please do talk about it and continue doing it.

do not have to touch this person, do not have to realize that their skin is just as real as their own, their pulse just as flowing)—through all of these elements the lack of touch is an instrument of power to maintain itself. Without touch we are denied the relationality of our bodies with others, an understanding of ourselves as made and making life through networks of relationships, and with the death or injury to this touch a part of us dies as well (Abu-Jamal 1996). Surveilling touch is instrumental in the systematic dehumanization of people. And through the lack of touch between people with structural power and those subjected to the violence of this power, an artificial sense of distance—the rejection of their intercorporeal subjecthood, the notion that I am only as we are—is maintained so such sovereign power is not brought into question. I think that the opening lines to Heather Schoenfeld’s book she gets at what I want to suggest, describing the “dog cages,” a form of cell in a prison in Florida, she writes “The cages are box-shaped, approximately ten square feet, with reinforced wire walls through which flow fresh air, sun, and other natural elements. The space between the wires is not big enough to put a hand or arm through” (2018:1). Prisons, the system and their logic, are structured through repetition and choreography to limit and script our touch—our relationships to each other, ourselves and nature. This system and logic is violent through its denial of our intercorporeal humanity. But try as it may, this system and logic are constructed by humans and reproduced by humans—they are not natural, though they benefit from being seen as such. What is natural is the flow of fresh air, sun and other natural elements. The continuous, flowing movement of the world, the rhythms and perpetual touching of elements and bodies and the sensations they produce and shape and move can never be severed or calculated or controlled by systems of dehumanization. There is always resistance in the air and the breathing.

The ways in which the hegemonic body at a middle school dance touches—either sexually, aggressively, or not at all—can be seen as writing the boundaries of the body. The mind-body divide has already been discussed above, but now comes the body-body divide, the reign of individualism, competition, and alienation that comes from the repeated and strict defining of borders and creation of distance between subjects. Touching, in my experience, tends to be sexual in the form of grinding or humping with the white boy pressed behind a girl or aggressive in the form of moshing or rough-play touching with other boys. With a lack of tender, or normalized non-sexual, non-aggressive, touching the notion of indivisibility of humanity, that one person's humanity is bound up with another's, is easily lost. I see this in the carceral state, where “The state skillfully and intentionally denies those it condemns a fundamental element and expression of humanity—that of touch and physical contact” (Abu-Jamal 1996:11). We are taught that separating people from one another, creating physical and emotional distance, is normal, not an egregious technique of dehumanization. Under the phallic imaginary is where this makes sense. When our deepest mapping, coding, and coloring of the world is textured by individualism and seeing each unitary subject as of and for him/her/themself of course we are able to justify tearing apart loved ones and strangers in the name of “justice.” When we are constantly practicing removing ourselves from our bodies—seeing our bodies not as part of who we are in symbiosis with our minds, but as tools for our minds to control—and other people's bodies (not feeling platonic, quotidian acts of physical contact with one another are crucial to our health, as mere extensions of our own bodies and humanity), we are desensitizing ourselves to the corporeal violence enacted through, on, and by bodies daily. We are practicing conceptualizing “their bodies” as extra to the context of “our bodies,” “their problems,” “their harm and hurt,” “their violence and pleasure” as separate from our own. This is a tool of a violent hegemony. To

desensitize us, to get us to so deeply feel disconnected that we do not see reason or possibility for alternatives.

When we normalize violence, we do it upon the dehumanization of the other. We understand the other as separate, in some way, from ourselves, and something about this separateness justifies such violence. We erect borders. Physical borders of a prison—a barbed-wire fence, juridico-political borders of a state—a mapped line, social borders of a class—a stigma, somatic borders of a body—a skin. We might ask ourselves, what implicit borders do we take up to define the other and naturalize violence (Samson Opondo, in conversation November 01, 2018)?

### On Imagination.

How do we frame, walk, and move with the carceral logic? What might something as seemingly inconsequential as a middle school dance have to do with the mundane inscription of systemic violence? These are some of the uncountable potential questions we can begin, and begin again, by asking ourselves. The carceral logic and phallic imaginary live in practice. It will take practice to disinvest from them and grow ourselves in other understandings of the world. In sharing on prison abolition, Alexis Pauline Gumbs writes

“abolition [as] an embodied praxis that takes time to unfold, and that may never be completed, but that takes root in complex histories of violence and resistance. She enjoins readers to reflect on the place where they stand—on ground that is ‘thick with screams, hard with the caked silences of those who resigned themselves to pain,’ ground for the ‘sacrifice of bodies to capital’—but also ground that is ‘ready with queer potentials,’ ‘as full of alternative histories and forgotten resistance as our skin cells’” (Oliver 2018:253).

Our bodies have incalculable ways of moving anew—of imagining and practicing imaginations. Incalculable ways of touching and shaping and dancing that disavow violence as the life-blood of the living.

Our lives and imaginations do not have to rely on pain—they can be based in pleasure. This is not to say everything is perfect, but they can practice drawing themselves from and reorienting themselves toward pleasure. Bodies can practice new practices. This is not as it must be. We can practice different embodiments, gestures, and movements that disrupt and destruct the carceral logic and phallic imaginary. Just as the hegemonic body has been conditioned not to dance, a new generation of children can be raised who don't believe that white men don't dance.

All these terms are feeling muddy, let's clarify,

The carceral imagination is, in my mind, one in the same as the phallic imaginary, which attempts to organize the world around phallogocentric centering of the “one” against the other. Feminist theorists have used the term “phallic imaginary” as a way to describe how the world is theorized and understood in masculine parameters, particularly conceptions of pleasure. I lean here on pleasure and sex because I think sex is a crucial site that both underlays many of our interactions and conceptions of the world and power dynamics—a site that both seeps and is seeped into. Sexuality has largely been imagined and theorized within the parameters of hegemonic masculinity (Irigaray 1985:323), much as the world has always been seen as the world of the hegemonic man—ignoring, demonizing or exoticizing the other worlds and sexualities that exist within. I would extend this cautiously to describe all of those seen merely as bodies, rather than minds, within the carceral world—all of those who are not the hegemonic man—people of color, women, trans, and non-binary people, queer, disabled, and working-class people. As Luce Irigaray sees it, the contemporary culture in the West is based around the symbol of the phallus and its choreography of pleasure—a pleasure of the one, a pleasure coursed with pain in its use and abuse of other bodies as its sexual objects. This symbol of the phallus structures our imaginary—how we see and create, understand relationships, sex, architecture,

logic, why, language. Those with much of the access to the power of indoctrination and the keeping of the hegemony—the hegemonic man through media, education, language, religion, science, politics, etc, frame and continue reframing these spheres and our collective ideology as that of the “one” (implicitly versus, and using, the other), leaving the chaos and craft of the world to be framed as a calculus.

*What could an alternative imaginary be like?*

Irigaray offers an alternative imaginary (often critiqued as essentialist), as she believes pleasure is inseparable from imaginary. In this vein, might we not have better sex in a world without prisons, a world that doesn’t depend on pain and suffering for life and pleasure, but rather feeds pleasure into pleasure? This is not to be glorifying alternative worlds or imaginaries. None would be perfect, blissful, peaceful, with no chaos or harm. Of course not. But we can do better than where we are, and to indulge in the pleasures of imagining (but not glorifying or exoticizing current or historical examples, simply drawing from and with them to imagine future ones) is part of building a world based, in part, in such symbiotic pleasure. To find the prison in us all, in order to work against its hold on our minds and hearts and bodies let us ruminate on sex (defined as we each wish) and work against the hold of the phallus on our imaginary. Other imaginations are possible that are not calculated and calculable—that center the many, the plural, the all. As Irigaray’s imaginary does, we can resist the phallic imaginary of calculus, or numeration, competition and formulaic power and pleasure. To take into account, and center in our discourse and social framework, touch and pleasure that rejects that of the violent phallic world is to open questions, and opportunities for alternative futurities. This emplacement of alternative sexual, corporeal, and intimate understandings reinvents the economy. Our liberation must be sexual and economic, ideological through its physicality. This resistant economy already

always exists within and is powerful, just as Italian Marxist Silvia Federici notes the demystification of the body (and particularly women's bodies and their relationships), and demonization of magic, necessary for capitalism's exploitative control and to crush spaces of resistance (2018:27). But resistance always exists within the magic of the body—the sensations that arise and float and ground and move us, the conceptions and dreams and actions we build from these, and the relationships they forge and maintain between people and the living world. The phallic economy, the carceral imaginary—able-bodied capitalism, the cisheteropatriarchy and white supremacy—rest on the suppression of our bodies and a repression and forgetting of the capacities of our bodies to feel, touch, create and foster, hold and behold. That magic is never gone.

These other imaginations leave room for new forms of pleasure to be experienced. Not only is it possible to change the entire system and our bodies—it can be pleasurable! One imaginary that Irigaray proposes is one that “supplants the logic of the gaze with the logic of touch” (Fuss 1989:98), this implies “the displacement of the male economy of desire for... [an] economy of pleasure or *jouissance*” (Dallery 1989:54). Arlene Dallery explains *jouissance* as “a giving, expending, dispensing of pleasure without concern about ends or closure; it is sexual, spiritual, physical and conceptual, at the same time” (1989:56-57). It is because of the fibrous, deep tissue, everpresent character of sexuality and physical pleasure that Ann Jones calls for this, for “the immediacy with which the body, the id, *joissance*, are supposedly experienced promises a clarity of perception and a vitality that can bring down mountains of phallogentric delusion” (1981:361). The possibilities of this pleasure, of this other imaginary (and other imaginaries) are boundless—for it takes and makes up no bounds, with its incalculability, its flux, its leaning into and being leaned on in tandem. If another “imaginary happened to unfold, if it happened to come

into play other than as pieces, scraps, deprived of their assemblage, would it present itself for all that as *a* universe?" (Irigaray 1985:327). Mmm. Let's knead and fold and knead again this fabric. Walking with, building in, holding through a pleasurable universe in the coming.



## **Chapter Four:**

### **Imaginaries: Prison Abolition and Physical Practice.**

#### Prison Abolition.

We can see the violent power structures and systems of oppression that orchestrate the contemporary world in prisons and the logic of carcerality. We've talked about how ingrained these patterns and practices of violence are, such that they are even written into our most intimate own—our bodies. If prisons rely on, and uphold, violent praxis, to get rid of prisons we need to completely restructure the world as we know it—simultaneously working against white supremacy, the cisheteropatriarchy, and capitalism. Wherever the carceral logic exists, the violence that incarceration exemplifies finds home. Prison abolition is knowing that we can do better, that we need to get rid of the systems of order now. Prison abolition is believing that other worlds are possible; that capitalism, the cisheteropatriarchy, and white supremacy are not without historical context, time and place—that systems, logics, and practices of violence are not natural to humankind. Prison abolition is trusting that people can learn new practices, can build these worlds—because if we can't trust this, if we can't believe this, then how can we work to face the violence practiced every day?

*Really though, what is prison abolition?*

Prison abolition is seeing prison not as an isolated institution, but the fiber that spans and holds together the hegemonic body. Prisons, to me, weave together capitalism, the cisheteropatriarchy, and white supremacy, upholding them all through the language of, and for, the state. They naturalize all of these violences because they themselves, the connective tissue of systemic violence, are so normalized in our contemporary societal moment. Prisons then, are a particularly strategic place to dismantle oppressive systems—by being the lifeline, if we center

our imagining and building of alternatives in a framework that sees prisons as the heart we can work to expose the functioning of the body of these oppressive systems. Prison abolition lives here.

Just as all violence is interconnected, and we see prisons as a meaningful central node of it, all movements to resist violence are interconnected—and prison abolition is bellied in these movements working together. According to Critical Resistance,

“‘abolishing prisons’ really means the creation of a society where systemic and historical oppression are wiped out so that everyone’s basic needs are met, where child abuse and domestic violence are zeroed out, and where war is absolutely not an option to ‘protect’ ourselves or to drain capital from abroad to inflate a declining domestic economy” (2008:111).

It is “The prison abolition movement’s resolve to organize around *all or none*—its refusal to leave anyone behind...[that] presents possibilities for collaborative work across movements” (Escobar 2016:13). For, “Engaging in radical freedom [a process that aims to get to the root of social problems] necessitates challenging all forms of oppression simultaneously” (Escobar 2016:15). Most people stop here and throw their hands up. How? We can’t just tear down all of the systems today—all of the problems would still exist with no solutions. Sure, yes. But bear in mind that the “solutions” we have now are creating more harm, not more health and healing. And, we’re not arguing for anything immediate. These systems took centuries to build up, they will take awhile to take down; it’s while we work at taking them down that we are simultaneously building alternatives. MPD150 explains, “Prison abolition work is not about snapping our fingers and instantly defunding every department in the world. Rather, we’re talking about a gradual process of strategically reallocating resources, funding, and responsibility away from police and toward community-based models of safety, support, and prevention” (2017), and the same for all structures of oppression. With time. Capitalism demands a certain pace of life. To oppose it and all its violences, we need to take on new timeframes and rhythms ourselves and in our work.

The hegemonic order of the contemporary world thrives on naming the “natural,” ahistoricity, and writing itself into our lives so covertly that we don’t know any other way. Capitalism, white supremacy, the cisheteropatriarchy, and prisons are not without histories, none of these systems were predetermined or existing apart from sociohistorical context. Yet they’re painted as natural—or not painted as anything, as they’re seen to be the very structure of the house we’re living in. But there’s a whole other world outside. Just because the house is built doesn’t mean it’s the only place. Systems of power need us to believe that the world we live in is the way the world is meant to be, has to be, or can only be in order to limit our questioning of it. Why is it so hard for us to imagine a world without prisons? Imagination is key to prison abolition. As the opportunity, joy, and question of imagining alternative ways of being and living together is never really asked of us, we have a hard time imagining what the world we want to build could be like. In order to believe other worlds are possible, we get to, and need to, practice imagining those worlds first, in order to be able to begin to walk towards them. The ways we have been conditioned to move throughout, and think about, the world have ignored our bodies and imaginations in their wholeness—there are innumerate ways that we get the pleasure and responsibility of imagining as part of abolitionist work.

### Imaginariness in Prison Abolition.

Prisons rely on our contemporary imaginary. Prison abolitionist Angela Davis asks, “Why do we take prison for granted?” (2003:15). In a similar vein, and terrifyingly articulated, “Mark Fisher once famously said that it’s easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism. The same could be said about prisons: it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine a world without prisons” (Wang 2018:297). Prisons control our imagination. That’s horrifying. But sit with that—how hard is it to imagine a world without prisons? Usually,

pretty hard. The way our world works relies on our senses, our imaginations, our ideas and desires being limited to the present socio-historical moment, so that either we feel this world is the best world, the only world, or the least-worst world possible. The carceral logic, ingrained in our very bodies, does this work for prisons—"the ideological work that the prison performs—it relieves us of the responsibility of seriously engaging with the problems of our society, especially those produced by racism and, increasingly, global capitalism" (Davis 2003:16). By normalizing prisons we excuse ourselves from honestly engaging with white supremacy, cisheteropatriarchy, able-bodied capitalism and violence at-large. In her work *Citizen*, Claudia Rankine writes, "Because white men can't/ police their imagination/ black men are dying" (2014:135). It could also be said that because white men police our imaginations black men are dying. Taking our imaginations back and nurturing them collectively is crucial to working against violence and building a world without prisons.

The carceral logic, and the hold it has on our collective imaginary, selectively textures the world, restricting our understandings of reality, possibility and imaginations for the future.

Reverend angel Kyodo Williams explains a lens that I lean on here,

"Just as the ego-mind is a construct that constantly reinforces itself—building structures and systems of control and developing attitudes and views that maintain its primacy and sense of solidity so that it can substantiate its validity—so, too, does this construct of whiteness. One could call it the Mind of Whiteness. The construct has been designed so that white America...lives inside the prison of that small mind, such that without intentional intervention, you cannot see over the wall of the reinforcing perspectives that affirm and perpetuate the White Superiority Complex. The complex would disintegrate if the vastness of your own racial bias were illuminated. So you remain in ignorance, blind to the reality before you, which is necessary to escape the sheer anguish of how pervasive it is, how you unerringly participate and how seemingly inescapable it is. But just as the ego-mind cannot be used to work its way out of its own construct, so too can the Mind of Whiteness not be used to see through the veil of its own construct. On the one hand, this is where a practice that illuminates the nature of mind comes in. We are gifted with precisely the tools and methodologies needed for the project of deconstructing. But that lens of awareness must be placed outside of the construct" (2016:xxvii-xxviii).

In this stream, the carceral logic imprisons our imaginations, and this locking down of our imaginations would be revealed if we felt how deeply this logic is enfleshed. We remain numb to

the systems working around and through us because to see them is to feel them, and it's not a good feeling. When we do work on deconstructing this imagination, we must do so outside of its own texturing. We must leap, rattle, unground. In her work *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women* (2018), Silvia Federici traces the importance of our own coming to fear our bodies to maintain capitalism. She touches on how, for capitalism, and oppressive systems and patterns to work generally, there has to be the illusion that they can fully exploit, that power only exists in a certain domain (Federici 2018). Witchcraft knows that power exists in other planes, other forms—there is a magic and a mysticism of the body that cannot be conquered or exploited, subjected or boundaried (Federici 2018). Of course then, for fear of this power, it makes sense that the hegemonic power has always demonized and discredited the powerful relationships and practices of people of color, the working class, and women and queer people throughout history and used this painting of witchcraft to justify violence against them. We draw from this magic, this corporeal knowing, beating, in elucidating other imaginaries. For “Imagination is excess, is that which could never be contained by the prison, that which will always exceed it” (Wang 2018:316). Our imaginations are our power, our magic.

Prison abolition relies on alternative imaginaries. Jackie Wang writes,

“at this historical juncture prisons have become thoroughly naturalized. Imagining and working toward a world without prisons—which is the project of prison abolition—would not only require us to fundamentally rethink the role of the state in society, but it would also require us to work toward the total transformation of all social relations. A project as lofty and ambitious as this is easy to dismiss as unrealistic, utopian, impractical, naïve—and unrealizable dream. But what if—instead of reacting to these charges with counter-arguments that persuasively demonstrate that the abolitionist position is the only sensible position—we instead strategically use these charges themselves as a point of departure to show how the prison itself is a problem for thought that can only be unthought using a mode of thinking that does not capitulate to the realism of the Present? Can the re-enchantment of the world be an instrument that we use to shatter the realism of the prison?” (2018:297-298).

This re-enchantment goes in hand with the corporeal magic that Federici evokes. It is the work of prison abolition to ask questions in its work to conceive—“Taking on the work of political

imagining is central to working toward a different social world” (Escobar 2016:176). One way in which the prison abolition movement does this is by taking “on the labor of imagining ways of social belonging that depart from relying on existing binaries” (Escobar 2016:3).

In this work of imagining there is no answer. There is no one way. No perfect combination that will lead to a perfect world. This work is plural, with many questions, possibilities, none of them perfect, but many of them worth trying because they are less harmful than the world as it is right now. Angela Davis writes, “An abolitionist approach that seeks to answer questions such as these would require us to imagine a constellation of alternative strategies and institutions, with the ultimate aim of removing the prison from the social and ideological landscapes of our society” (2003:107). A constellation. Innumerable possibilities; we are not to be frozen with fear of perfection. Thoughtful imagining is to occur now, we must “attempt to create a new conceptual terrain for imagining alternatives to imprisonment” (Davis 2003:112), holding at our core the plurality of possibility.

One example reframing is offered by Alison Kafer, she “thoughtfully asks us to consider the following question: “What does it mean to think of ‘these imagined futures—and hence these lived presents—differently...[where] disability is understood otherwise: as political, as valuable, as integral” (Erevelles 2018:2). She sees disability as a crucial crux of oppression, as it intersects all identities and is one of the most invisible, or most normalized, axis of dehumanization. To see disabled people as critical in the working of the world (and not as a class to be dispossessed and exploited), to see disability as a project of disabling and disability for the social construction it is, is to entirely shift a paradigm. Not even to turn it on its head, but to scrap it entirely, as our contemporary understanding of the world rests so heavily on the disabling of people and the

moralized dehumanization of disabled people, that a shift of such a type is entirely leaving our contemporary imagination and demands a new way of seeing entirely. Jackie Wang writes,

“The imagination is constitutive...It’s not just unworldly, detached from the world spinning off the refusal of things, rather it’s constitutive in the sense that the imagination becomes so intense and embedded that it becomes real through its intensification and articulation. That puts theory in the realm of prophecy, but not prophecy in the realm of saying what’s going to happen. Instead, it’s the fostering of the imagination, the encouraging of that power to recognize that life can be, and in some ways already is, different” (2018:316-317).

The way we see things is powerful. To see the world differently is to be in the world differently is to move differently is to build differently is to make other worlds in that image and language and form.

The possibilities are endless. Try. Firmly planted in the reality of the present, we can live in the pleural space of being and becoming, and being through becoming—of acknowledging power as it is materially, and the power of magic, of the body, of the imagination, of what could, can and will be. Beauty is nothing finite or false. Alexis Pauline Gumbs gorgeously asks us,

“What if abolition isn’t a shattering thing, not a crashing thing, not a wrecking ball event? What if abolition is something that sprouts out of the wet places in our eyes, the broken places in our skin, the waiting places in our palms, the tremble holding in my mouth when I turn to you? What if abolition is something that grows? What if abolishing the prison industrial complex is the fruit of our diligent gardening, building and deepening of a movement to respond to the violence of the state and the violence in our communities with sustainable, transformative love?” (CR10 2008:145).

### Moving Through/With Liberation.

Herbert Marcuse, a socialist with the Frankfurt School in the generation before prison abolitionist Angela Davis, theorized heavily on the role of art and cultural production in the creation of a counter-hegemony. Marcuse drew from Marx’s “emancipation of the senses” (West 2017) and his understandings of the body within capitalism—the ways in which our bodies are mechanized, their senses dulled, and potential intimacies cut off—to theorize that a crucial part of the struggle for collective liberation is the practice of liberating our senses. In order to interact with the world differently, and think different worlds are possible, we must be able to feel and

reframe what we know through our bodies. I want to emphasize practice here, as our bodily habitus are being practiced and reinforced constantly, so any aim of liberating the senses, and walking towards different embodiments will have to be a forgiving practice as well.

Our senses have been numbed. We have been made to only crave, find, and know certain sensations under contemporary hegemony. In order to maintain our imaginary within this world, we must only know and feel this world to be true and possible, we must deaden parts of ourselves that sense and yearn and make otherwise. In the face of these sensory restrictions, Marcuse proposes a “great refusal,” a radical subjectivity that changes every fiber of our being—a new sensibility (West 2017). This intended sensory dulling is glaringly evident in explicit carceral spaces, but there are always sites of rebellion—“Alone in your cell, your body became pure nerve. You were perceiving everything. It made you giddy, the inner joy you felt against the bleak backdrop of the Breslau prison” (Wang 2018:307). Reflecting on the Attica Rebellion, Jackie Wang writes, “Richard Clark watched in amazement as men embraced each other, and he saw one man break down into tears because it had been so long since he had been ‘allowed to get close to someone’” (2018:308). We find touch in a world of skin. I understand Marcuse’s proposal, as one with Du Bois’ idea that “people ‘must live and eat and strive, and still hold unfaltering commerce with the stars’” (Wang 2018:312). To act and reflect and theorize with the sensory reality we live in and always hold onto the senses of the further, the walking, the stars, futurities and feelings to come.

Wang questions, “Does the jailer remember what it means to love, to grieve, to rub the muscles of freedom or borrow the bird’s example? They cannot annihilate what we carry in our hearts and minds: This vision of an elsewhere, or the memory of a bird. How many poets and



revolutionaries discovered freedom in a cell?” (2018:304). Despite the ideological anesthetic, we always make ways to feel. Jackie Wang continues,

“I return to the stars—  
to the question of why people feel free when  
looking up at the stars.  
Is it because, when we are communing with the  
Stars, we become  
Part of the Whole?  
The whole of Life—  
We feel ourselves as recycled matter and energy  
Congealed in a temporary form  
A form that will not hold  
That will one day fall apart.

What did they feel when they looked up at the night sky?  
Did the vastness produce a feeling of freedom?  
Did they remember—there is world beyond the  
walls of this prison.  
Were they transported to their childhoods, to the  
Mystery,  
To the first time they contemplated their  
Place in the Whole?” (2018: 311)

Cracks are becoming. Through cracks in hegemonic numbing we find sensations, we make joy, we build worlds worth living in. Finally, Jackie Wang offers, “In the cracks of the prison, something bloomed. A field of wildflowers imposed on a night sky. Blood was coming” (Wang 2018:308). A re-membering of our disembodied bodies means blood-coming, night-sky-knowing, future-feeling movement.

Liberation is not stagnant—removing ourselves from the carceral imaginary is not a goal that will see an end, but rather a method of walking, of practicing for other worlds. Of walking towards and with, not to. According to Michel Foucault, “one must be careful when speaking of liberation. Foucault understood that liberation is often urgent and necessary. But he also insisted that it is never sufficient for creating full forms of existence. Instead he emphasized the need for ‘practices of freedom’... ‘over processes of liberation’” (Goldman 2010:4). Movement is practice. A learning and re-learning, a tracing and re-tracing. A praxis, in its evaluation and thought throughout. A sort of improvisation, Reverend angel Kyodo Williams offers,

“To inhabit radical as an ideal is to commit to going beyond one’s familiar or even chosen terrain. It avails you to what you weren’t willing to see, which is the place Truth resides. To embody that truth is to live beyond the limits of self-reinforcing habits, which take the narrative of the past, project it onto the future, and obscure the present, leaving us to sleepwalk in the dreamscape of other people’s desires and determinations. It is to transcend the borders erected by pain, fear, and apathy, to discover a new territory unbound by the privileges and preferences that trade freedom for familiarity and comfort but pretend they are one and the same. Because by definition it can never be static; to be radical is to constantly live in the territory yet undiscovered, the liberation yet unknown” (2016:xxii).

Reverend angel Kyodo Williams, Lama Rod Owens and Jasmine Syedullah practice Radical

Dharma—a practice of freedom centered on the body; Reverend angel Kyodo Williams writes,

“I couldn’t theorize a radical dharma, but rather had to seek to live it through principles and practices that lean toward liberation. To embody, to use by body as the testing ground out in the world. To give myself over to a field of play in which everything is allowed to happen: examination, experimentation, failure—lots of joyous failure—into emergence” (2016:xxix).

To Kyodo Williams the lingering on, listening too, and learning with the body is vital to any work towards liberation, as

“until our capital-V vision for liberation gives way to an accessible, translatable, adaptable yet rigorous praxis at meaningful scale—one that can match the energy and rebound through rhythm from the sustained stress the structures of oppression are designed to burden our minds, our bodies, and our hearts with—we cannot uproot those forces” (2016:xvi).

We need to work against the prison regime in large part by working against its hold on our minds, bodies and hearts—“We actually have to be the transformation, which is to say we have to transcend the form, the construct that we find ourselves in” (Kyodo Williams, Owens, and Syedullah 2016:xx). Their Radical Dharma came to them through corporeal fullness—

“Radical Dharma emerges from a lineage of insurgence that is about bringing our whole selves. We can’t marginalize others or ourselves as part of our pursuit of liberation, personal or political. We couldn’t have arrived here without a fuller and fuller fullness... Throughout our conversations, the deep connection between personal liberation and social transformation is increasingly clear. It is embodied” (Kyodo Williams, Owens, and Syedullah 2016:39).

### Somatics and Practice.

As we know the body is central to the production and maintenance of hegemonic violence—notably the prison regime—any practice of freedom, too, should draw from the body. I look here towards the soma, or “the living body in its wholeness” (Eddy 2017:5-6), as a potential space

of such practice. Somatic study, learning, and practice is centered on the idea of whole self. It rejects the body-mind separation foundational to existing systems of power, and understands a fuller practice of being and living with, as something done with attention to sensation, thought, action and their symbiosis. An attention to the body's relationship to itself and its surroundings can help us re-orient ourselves and work at imagining different ways of moving through and building the world. Kyodo Williams writes, "anyone engaged in the practice of liberation must actively discover it in their own being, and having a body-based or somatic practice is a direct way to reclaim connection to their psycho-physical connection to themselves" (2016:100). As the ways we exist are largely inherited, and the response to inheritances, a new bodily habitus will necessitate a forgiving practice.

Somatics are practices of listening to the knowledge of the body that already exists, but that we have been numbed to, that we have been taught is without value. Somatics can be a practice of laying, sitting, walking, dancing, alone, together—it is the way of giving attention to the knowledge of the body as (Eddy 2017:7). The practice of listening to the body is a form of learning about the mind—and practicing new attentions and movements and stillnesses offers the chance for new thoughts and understandings, encouraging us to continue new movements—movements towards and with other worlds. Martha Eddy explains, "With somatic activity, new patterns of movement are explored, opening up different neural pathways" (2017:7)—blinds have been drawn on these pathways under hegemony, to learn again to move with our eyes closed, consciously with our eyes closed, could just help us draw those blinds back and draw new paths to the new worlds.

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen writes, "There is something in nature that forms patterns. We, as part of nature, also form patterns. The mind is like the wind and the body like the sand; if you

want to know how the wind is blowing, you look at the sand” (1993:1). In hegemonic living, “people attend more readily to their tasks than themselves. In doing so, they are often displaced or alienated from lived embodiment...Somatic learning transforms automatic habits of body obliviousness into enactive consciousness” (Batson and Wilson 2014:130-131). Being numbed by capitalism, the cisheteropatriarchy, and white supremacy means, in part, a corporeal habit, “habits easily create a bodily profile that moves in ways that are conforming and obligatory. Awakening and attending to new sensations shift the compulsory toward new possibilities” (Batson and Wilson 2014:131). To understand ourselves differently is to understand the world differently, is to understand our relationship to this world and worlds to come differently—to know we deserve better, we can build better, and we will do better.

In a “disembodied culture that is a direct outcome of white supremacy and mass oppression” (Kyodo Williams, Owens, and Syedullah 2016:194), to be one with one’s body and one’s body within the environment is a radical posture. Movement activist Randy Martin believes that “Bodies can also be trained—or learn—in a manner that is inconsistent with dominance as such, which assumes investment in the logic and sensibility of exclusion and subordination” (Martin 1998:20) and that dance can be used as a tool to re-learn and re-train. Dance, through its art of practice, is a vast space for reconnection. *Radical Dharma* emphasizes the role of practice in liberation, saying,

“[to] form new cognitive connections based on direct experience that then becomes embodied through repetition—practice—is one of human beings’ greatest attributes. In this lies the potential to overcome our basest reaction for survival and manifest our highest evolutionary potential to thrive. It is profound, and it is possible, and we can see it” (2016:204).

Dance can do precisely this. Through centering, and moving with this sense of centering we practice re-orienting ourselves. Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen notes that “In [Body-Mind Centering], ‘centering’ is a process of balancing, not a place of arrival” (1993:1). To center—to be in a place

of knowing and questioning, of holding fear and hope and harm and healing with the energy and tender touch of love—is a process, done repeatedly through dance—in breathing, holding, rubbing, jumping, falling, touching, leaping, laying, breaking, sitting, popping, walking, turning, twisting, moving, saying still. When I talk of dance I talk of the body—not of performance, but of being in communication with one’s and other’s bodies, being present with.

### Bodies Through Practice.

Our bodies tell us our place—different embodiments can teach us new ways to understand ourselves within the world, new emplacements. Through the body we understand our place and come to consciousness (Batson and Wilson 2014:75). Attention to our patterned rhythms—in awareness of environmental and corporeal wave patterns, through movement and stillness—can show us how we are always in conversation with the construction of the world. Glenna Batson and Margaret Wilson use the word “enaction” to emphasize the growing conviction that cognition is not the representation of a pregiven world by a pregiven mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs...enacting brings forth reality” (2014:94). Place holds possibility.

Within these places, our bodies orient us. Sara Ahmed believes that “bodies become orientated by how they take up time and space” (2006:5). Patterns of place reveal where and how bodies feel “at home,” and as such, “Orientations...are about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places” (Ahmed 2006:8). Ahmed explains, “phenomenology reminds us that spaces are not exterior to bodies; instead, spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body” (2006:9)—space, reality, and futurity is always corporeal, mimicking and being mimicked, crafting and being crafted, it too has a porous skin, a constructed boundary inviting water’s course to flow through. Ahmed offers wandering as a way to disorient, and re-orient ourselves—to

imagine other worlds—"To 'wander' can mean to ramble without certain course, to stray from a path, or even to deviate in conduct or belief" (2006: 29). Wandering towards worlds.

One change of direction is explained by Susan Leigh Foster,

"the rising of the mountain is an idea started by the awareness of our own lifting or raising of our eyes, head, or neck, and it is an idea containing the awareness of that lifting or raising.' Informed by stored and averaged memories of that physical response to rising, as well as the immediate apprehension of the body's reaction to the visual sensation, the observer would 'make the mountain raise itself'" (2011:155).

The mountain doesn't seem so unchangeable when we lift our eyes. The world doesn't seem so stagnant when we move.

Ahmed offers disorientation as one way to queer phenomenology. I am cautiously supportive of this—I think disorientation is an important way to queer phenomenology for hegemonic bodies and comfortably proximate bodies. We've talked of social spaces taking the skins of the bodies that occupy them, and the hegemonic body being at home in the world—making it less easy for other bodies, in particular bodies of people of color. Bodies distant from the hegemonic body are often already somewhat disoriented in a hegemonic world. What needs to be asked is for hegemonic bodies to practice disorientation. For us to feel hope in the ways white boys at the middle school dance can disorient themselves, to find energy and faith in the power of youth to embody new, and re-member old, patterns, and to move towards this disorientation.

Re-orientations, movements of and toward freedom. Ground-shifting and re-grounding, as we practice moving with our eyes closed in new ways. How can we feel and see and know with our eyes closed? What spaces are built within the physical world between our bodies as we move, how can we more fully feel ourselves growing together and enacting loving politics within these spaces? How can we move with intention, making a strategic choreography? With eyes closed, how can we envision and embody other imagined worlds? When we move from closing

our eyes so as not to see, to closing our eyes to be able to see from within we are taking steps towards freedom.

Movement theorist Danielle Goldman imagines improvisational dance as a practice of freedom. She believes that

“In order to make improvised choices (which is not to imply a rigid opposition between instinct and rationality), one must develop a sense of how one’s own body pulses—how it moves habitually and how it might move otherwise—in relation to its surrounding rhythms, which are neither static nor essential” (2010:52).

She thoughtfully reminds us that “A rigorous discussion of improvisation’s corporeality demands that one recognize the materiality, sensual complexity, and historical weight that exists within, and presses upon, bodies” (Goldman 2010:56). To think of the body in complete abstraction is irresponsible and reductive—we each know our bodies best and what they feel, how they move, the realities they occupy. This conversation is merely to chew on, and move with if you feel so.

Goldman leaves us with:

“The *practice* of improvisation—the training that truly skillful improvisation requires—is a rigorous mode of making oneself ready for a range of potential situations. It is an incessant preparation, grounded in the present while open to the next moment’s possible actions and constraints. According to this logic, even when there is no ‘exquisite’ moment, no clear arrival or climax, the practice of improvisation is politically powerful as a mode of making oneself ready. This is the way in which improvisation pushes against static reifications of freedom” (2010:142).

Let’s improvise.

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## Appendix: A Praxis

### *on love and liberation: a practice in embodying abolitionist imaginaries*

What and why...

Through this work, I hope to have given you room to question how our bodies are involved in the creation of the world of now and the worlds that can come to be, and how they live within one another. As violence is all interconnected—and practiced in ways that appear to naturalize it in part through our bodies—our bodies can be understood as a site of resilience, resistance, and radical re-emergence. Liberation is not a destination, but a practice—building a world without prisons and all that demands is both a world on the horizon and a world being made through our imagination of it. To practice imagining, and feeling, this world without prisons, is a beautiful part of the process of resistance to violent hegemony. This is why I write this piece, and why I offer this practice. My intention is for this centering exercise to be used when you feel you are losing connection with others, the ground, yourself, or the possibility of radically loving futures to come. To be present with ourselves, each other, and nature is to defy the power that systems of oppression have on us—systemic violence depends on our dissociation from our bodies and interconnectivity—to feel fully is a rupture in power, a reclaiming of our own.

Here I offer a practice in corporeal alternative imagination. A centering exercise that seeks to help us remember to breathe. Breathe into the wisdom of our bodies—our interconnectedness, our seeping love and limitless imaginations, the ways we already know paths and practices home—towards and through new worlds. As I am re-centered and re-membered through the words and practices and touch of people around me, I lean here on the words and wisdom and movements of some of those who help radically ground me. I place particular weight into Alexis Pauline Gumbs’ Afrofuturist reimagining of the world, and ask us to enter her world with the tenderness she offers, respecting that it was made for black women (Joy 2018), and that her work and other works here can feed us—they are for our working sustenance, not consumption—as long as we continue to feed each other. By drawing from Afrofuturist works, we muddy time—bringing the future into the present and contorting the shape of possibility.

I write this with my body, and the format of this exercise reflects my shape. Please take these words and worlds as they work for your body. Play with this content and current, using what your body needs in the ways that it needs and leaving what your body doesn’t resonate with. There is no ideal body for this exercise. Shift words and pauses, play with rhythms and textures as you feel. This is a practice, and a messy one. When we wander from or with these words let us learn and re-ground. Place and re-place ourselves in this practice. Follow our breath. Move as we will, holding and using our energy towards a world without prisons. Be gentle and believing of and in ourselves. Vulnerability is crucial—to be honest, open, and trusting in the connections of our bodies and place is to work against violence, it is a heavy task, but one for which we have ceaseless potential. This exercise is written to be read aloud and shared, so we can walk with each other through centering, but please use it as you wish. Trust yourself to get comfortable, and if you wish, lay on the ground... close your eyes... breathe in.... breathe out...

### **LAYING.**

*(breathing)*

“Where are we?  
A body amongst a sea of bodies, a body in a sea  
A time, a space, a place, a presence, a sense

Our body is of bodies  
One of many and one of a kind  
As we walk in and towards a world in which many worlds fit, we learn ourselves as one body in  
which many bodies are

Each body moves at a different pace, through a different path  
If we listen, our bodies speak to us

Let’s listen to our breath... noticing what we notice, we ask: what is its rhythm?  
Through our breath we are reminded of the space we weave together, the time we share” (texture  
2018)

*breathe in... breathe out... breathe in... feel the shape of air in  
your body as it’s held, and let it pass, as breath moves through us. imagine oceans  
of breath. pulsing through this space, offering themselves, keeping us afloat as they  
course through our bodies, enlivening our cell(ves). ebbing body to body, space to  
space—a connective tissue, a weaving—woven and (re)woven. breathe out... breathe  
in... breathe out...*

In the world she builds in the wake of living destruction, Alexis Pauline Gumbs  
reminds us that one body was never the actual scale of breathing. One body was never  
enough (2018:6). How funny we could forget.  
Tidalectics becomes us—and became, and is becoming, and has been through which  
we are becoming. With water we are, we are being reminded:  
“For us to be in our form, the tides must remain in theirs—they are not outside us but  
part of the embankments of existence that embank us...the tides and coastal headlands  
are another epidermal layer to my skin... We are able to breathe because we are the  
external lungs of the sea” (Hessler 2018:175).

We thought love was silly when we thought one body was enough. Now we let breath  
laugh as we (un)learn. *breathe in... breathe out... breathe in...*  
The tides of our skins, our guts, our growing—the shapes of breath as it re(kin)dles us  
with the ground and the moon, the lightness in our toes and the weight of wholeness.  
We re-mem-ber how “love is liberation and liberation is love” (Kyodo Williams,  
Owens, and Syedullah 2016:85). Our *my breath holds its rhythm with the presence of  
yours, an oh yeah, the dirt and your knuckles and the stars don’t make much sense  
apart, I trust you and the way you walk*, bell hooks (2000) type-love (Shihan 2016).

Some people call this love mothering. Not in the biological sense, but in the *we can  
hold and grow with each other with the care and work of our hands* way. Cynthia

Dewi Oka says, “The revolutionary struggle against a colonial, racism, hetero-patriarchal capitalism which has for centuries separated us; arranged us in structured oppositions to each other; reduced our bodies to raw resources for abuse, exploitation and manipulation; and, in the words of Frantz Fanon, occupied our breathing, is today the struggle for a world—no, many worlds—where we might exist and thrive as each other’s beloved. It is the struggle not only for a social universe that is meaningful and just, but lives that are inherently precious. It is the struggle against our elimination, our disappearance from each other. Mothering is a primary front in this struggle, not as a biological function, but as a social practice” (Gumbs, Martens and Williams 2016:51).

*breathe out... breathe in... breathe out...*

Gumbs writes on the “porousness of love” (2018:7). The notion of being only all, never a-part. A metonym in a sense, but not like a part representing the whole. Like waves—indistinguishable in cycle and form, creating through one another. This love like flowing. Like water’s touch. Indeterminable. A seeping and swelling, without finitude, breaking and building with its weight, its un-endingness, its being through. The ground’s skin holds my own, a seeping of love. Funny how we talked about resources, when somethings live by growing. When Octavia Butler’s God is change (1993). Where love is—not a here or there, giving or taking, , beginning or end, more or less. A coursing, a care, a practice of learning and (re)learning. Bodies of water trust their continuity, knowing how to love their change. Perhaps this is the “germinal wisdom” of Donna Haraway (2016:118). A breathing, gut-being.

*Breathe in.... Hold the energy in your core, breathe out... bring it through you, feel the extension of your core in what grounds and moves you—breath cycling through our fibers, skins, toes, tissues, bones. From our centered place, energy feeding through our arms and legs and fingers and toes, continuing through the spaces between and between us, and breathing it back in, and out... a song of tides*

“it actually lifts her out of bed. breathing or something like it. water in her veins. salt. spirit. rush. she has no one to describe it to. she would say wave crash but she has not seen the ocean. would say lightening, would say wait and come back, I’ll show you. the next day she draws in in flour on the floor, the stars she has seen with her body, the stars she hold, they are children. and the shapes she makes are the shapes of her hands in every direction” (Gumbs 2016:19).

*(feet)*

“Now our feet... feel their continuity  
Our feet are roots, our body a part of the ground  
We are only as live as the soil that breathes through us” (texture 2018)

*Remember your breath; breathe in... breathe out... feel your breath in your feet*



The mothering Dewi Oka asks us to be with is a (re)grounding. A finding of gravity in “a commitment to the survival of other bodies,” (Gumbs, Martens and Williams 2016:52) a coming to balance by weaving ourselves together. Stability in knowing the logics that teach us to “[unmoor] us from each other” (Gumbs, Martens and Williams 2016:52) are semantic, that we were never without the other, but through.

Joy lives in this practice of mothering, in what Silvia Federici names the “re-enchantment” (2018:188-189). Much of the present power’s grip on the present and futurity lives in a forgetting and fearing of magic. Systems of violence need us to (un)learn the trust in our bodily knowledges and connections—to learn to live again, to “regain a sense of wholeness in our lives,” (Federici 2018:188-189) like the river, we recognize our flows. The magic of water, our flow, our breath within the other.

Donna Haraway urges us to “[sow] worlds” (2016:118). Opening the stories of people to the stories of companions species—the networks of symbiosis and living and dying with, rather than against or for—with all of the trouble and chaos this brings (Haraway 2016:118).

What’s the relationship between your feet and the rest? Try not to let words answer what the bones know already. Listen to their capacity for work and joy.

“that was when she learned to stretch. she nurtured the tense intention to outgrow her skin. to reach for what was nowhere nearby. to embrace the unembraceable around her. she let her fingernails grow out, refused to trim her edges. she wanted up through the ceiling, down through the floor. she refused the short limits of this body. she wanted to be long” (Gumbs 2018:207).

*(legs)*

“What about our legs?... noticing what we notice, bring our focus to their stability  
We are as we become, as we walk  
Through walking we draw our paths of and to a new world” (texture 2018)

[My thighs are warm and steady. my neck, light, with ease and doubt but ever an emptiness that reminds me I’m whole my forearms, sanded and sanded by the old man on the roof, working tirelessly to feel something, something that feels right, but caught in that subtle joy of process—this might be right, right might be what’s here. Still ever sanding. The heavy drip below my ears, my mom’s calloused hands grinding on her wheels feeling the ground below her, and shucking corn, holding the hot water bottle squeezing, tempting the burn of her palms and nursing its warmth to become her own my cheeks feel light. That’s nice; some butter, a little kiss, maybe I’m in a sun-stained car, we like the sweat it makes it salty and the dripping only helps too. The sides though are hiding. Something tense but who knows. There’s always some tension in sitting up straight. Reminds me of the lightness of cheeks and to be grateful for the sun caught in my brow. There are hands anyways, that don’t mind drawing the tension from the jaw, knuckles kneading her down. To an easy place, not down as in withered. Down so she can remember the weight of her own, and it all and trust that the weight is water that will keep her afloat. And always salty. Always enough salt]

Audre Lorde says the erotic offers a “well of replenishing” (1984:61). I like that. I think I can feel that in my legs, in their stillness. The erotic of the mundane, of just laying down in time.

“the decision was in her legs. how they unlocked at the knee, how they tried to kick tomorrow. how they stretched out of the structure of standing to fly” (Gumbs 2016:114).

*(hips)*

“And our hips?...sense their groundedness  
Our hips are a bowl, embracing what comes and goes  
Let us ground ourselves in celebration; we rejoice, we dance” (texture 2018)

*Breathe into your hips. Breathe out...*

José Esteban Muñoz talks about the language of the hips as a form of poetics (Fraser and Esteban Muñoz 1997). Language, lexicon, liturgy? The hips resist the frames offered them. Breaking conditions, they know in relationships, in connections, in holding and pouring. A rebellion of the everyday (Fraser and Esteban Muñoz 1997).

[where are the waves?  
mom taught me about soup. about its making. the swells of living in swallowing. how it makes us whole and re-  
members. how it pours. its shape stretches to share. it heals. the wonders of a spoon in motion  
our hips remember  
how to hold soup with skin  
    a pouring, unforgotten  
    in the warmth of a palm by night; a bearing, a beholding  
the habit that knows itself before our own,  
    as if they were ours, are ours  
she doesn't understand knowing  
    it's the ebbing, the breathing  
    the going, the always through—that's enough  
the cosmos in our flesh  
    the stars in our pores where dreams have fallen, the  
    motion of building within lost dreams  
    dreams held in our skins  
she lives through our cells  
    a texture best untheorized.  
    the tenderness of waves with(in)]

[Esas ganas de sentirme  
bajo el ombligo de mi falda  
ese territorio pocas veces explorado  
y tantas veces ocupado  
por intereses del Estado

Esas ganas de mecarme conmigo  
en circulitos de placer  
Izquierda-derecha-derecha-izquierda  
vayviene, vieneva/vayviene, vieneva

Ese grito silencioso explotando hondo  
crece como mar en luna llena  
    crece y sube  
    haciendo nido en mis pechos  
    crece y corre  
    hacia mis retorcidos labios sucios

fuerte suave  
 lento suspiro  
 cierra-abre-abre-cierra/cierra-abre-abre-cierra  
 fuerte suave  
 lento suspiro  
 Fuerte  
 Suave  
 Lento  
 Suspiro

Me desdoble  
 Respiro  
 y me hago lluvia

Lluvia de agua más turbia  
 lluvia color río  
 color mar  
 color revolución  
 color cascada  
 // lluvia/de/agua/ /más/turbia/ /  
 (Caraballo 2015:14-15)]

“it was no longer a matter of sex.  
 this new molecular relationship made distance and intimacy words that tangled.  
 or to say it another way.  
 we were all close.  
 beyond close.  
 not knowing where one person ended and another began was no longer love-song advertising or  
 evidence of codependency.  
 it was a real issue. so then identity ( $x=x$ ) was no longer technically true. the previous energetic  
 reality of how we are not whole and change each other and are not ourselves in the most limited  
 version of our imagination became impossible to ignore on the physical level.  
 so love was not about merging or finding exceptional moments when we could die enough to  
 shrug off the pain of individuality. it was just a certain sound, a vibration, and when we achieved  
 it, it was really all of us.” (Gumbs 2018:17)

*(stomach)*

“Moving to our stomach...noticing what we notice, feel its fluidity  
 Our love is of bread; a process, feeling our fullness, filling ourselves and each other” (texture  
 2018)

adrienne maree brown calls upon Chani Nicholas to remind us that there is not path,  
 no leader, in building a new worlds: “You weren’t starving before you got here. You  
 were born full” (brown 2017:12). Similarly, Donna Haraway draws upon sympoietic  
 entities to choreograph resistance, noting their name “holobionts [etymologically is]  
 ‘entire beings’ or ‘safe and sound beings’” 2016:60). Safe and sound in our watery  
 oneness.

““We need a god who bleeds

spreads her lunar vulva & showers us in shades of scarlet  
thick & warm like the breath of her  
our mothers tearing to let us in  
this place breaks open  
like our mothers bleeding  
the planet is heaving mourning our ignorance  
the moon tugs the seas  
to hold her/to hold her  
embrace swelling hills/i am  
not wounded i am bleeding to life

we need a god who bleeds now  
whose wounds are not the end of anything” (Shange 2017:3)

A god of healing and chaos and care. *Practice breathing into your stomach.*  
What does breathing with this god mean?

“we could always see through our belly buttons. we just didn’t know what seeing really was before then. we depended on the periscopes in our heads to warn us, to show us, to teach us the good. we walked in the world like defense towers, but that wasn’t the real shape at all. remember when that person you trusted more than you trusted yourself told you to trust your own gut? the brain below-your belly button that was always right? always right underneath the words? where do you think she got her info? it was the half-blind poets and the beautiful remaining grandmothers who finally taught us to see. to remember. to be” (Gumbs 2018:177)

(back)

“Where is our back?...hear its stillness  
Our back supports learning and teaching, an always reciprocity  
Looking over our mother’s shoulder, we learn the world, and learn to teach her of the world to come” (texture 2018)

Lama Rod Owens speaks of the “privilege of the weight” of being well, of healing (2016:61). Knowing wholeness is messy, and pleasure will never entirely replace pain. In sitting with this, there is a weight, or a gravity, to living. The weight of collective care—“In order to collectively figure out how to sustain and support our evolving species, in order to participate in and demand a society where people help to create each other instead of too often destroying each other, we need to look at the practice of creating, nurturing, affirming, and supporting life that we call mothering” (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016:9).

To mull over mothering as “a possible action” is a way of stretching (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016:22-23). Noticing the potential in our fibers to pull and and reach and hold, of our skin to fold and make kin. A common flesh.

*Breathe into your back.* What possibilities does its shape hold?

“she taught them about shoulders. how upside down, they could still carry the world. she taught them about air and how one way to get it is to scream. she taught them about breathing and that the first way to do it is underwater. she taught them about the necessity of lubrication, the bright beauty of blood, the elasticity of membrane, the flexibility of a body holding on to itself, the grace of a first dive.

and she would continue to teach them so many things. simply by being alive.” (Gumbs 2018:209)

*(chest)*

“Rest in our chest...noticing what we notice, let our chest expand, contract, expand  
How do we create community with our chest?  
Contract, expand, contract” (texture 2018)

What does it mean to awaken in the wake? Christina Sharpe talks about us living in the wake of the Middle Passage (2016), of anti-black violence within this wake. bell hooks talks of “awakening to love” (2000:87). How might we learn with one another to love in this wake, how might we practice love in the everyday life of the wake to bring ourselves to feel, and share, “love’s sacred presence” (hooks 2000:xxvii-xxix)? A love of “Care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication” (hooks 2000:5), whose form takes shape with currents, whose strength is that of water.

*Breathe in... breathe out... breathe in...*

Sympoiesis means “making-with” (Haraway 2016:58). Nothing writes itself, nothing makes itself, in nature.

“she could breathe. that much. she could breathe. and maybe her ribs felt it too much but it was there. and she had to believe that the network of microscopic balloon cells in her chest had a say and could collaborate with oxygen to make some small decision called live. she had more to give, she decided, as smoke ran the distance of her blood. telling her she should walk more she should breathe more deeply she should cherish crisp presence over warmth. she was smiling as a breeze brushed her cheek like a matte page out of a fall catalog full of plaid she could not now or never before afford. and her eyes watered like this. like an ancestor kiss. and the laughter crackled out from the embers of her red engine heart and she laughed and laughed at her lesson. what an early winter wonder that it took burning the whole damn house down to find out” (Gumbs 2016:34)

*(arms)*

“Continuing with our arms... is there tension?  
Our arms carry on the work of yesterdays into tomorrows” (texture 2018)

There is magic in what our bodies know—“our need for the sun, the wind, the sky, the need for touching, smelling, sleeping, making love, and being in the open air” (Federici 2016:190). The world of today needs us to forget the magic in these

practices, practices that we already know how to do together. We can feed each other in ways systems could never, so they must be forgotten. But the breath never forgets, the body can always (re)member.

Healing, (re)membering, asks us to imagine different ways of being in the world (Kyodo Williams, Owens, and Syedullah 2016:62). We can, and deserve it to one another, to practice imagining and being in new ways now. We can cherish the weight of possibility of youth, as “children are the ways that the world begins again and again” (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016:12-13). June Jordan believes we have the opportunity, and obligation—and how delightful a pair—to nurture children to their freedom (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016:12-13). Maybe this feels like bell hooks’ children’s books, where with nightfall, “all the girlpies sleep tenderly [with] memories of arms that hold me...holding me still. [With] no need to fear....’cause everywhere is home” (2002).

“breathing in she smooths the ocean of her forehead. breathing out her eyebrows probably down. hand behind her own back she reaches for her leg for her strength her other hand. keep breathing. muscles enter stretch and shoulder wisdom pop unlocks. her feet root legs remember what it takes to stand. there is always something to reach across always something to hold on to. even if it’s your own wilding body even if it is your own hand.” (Gumbs 2016:57)

*(hands)*

“What are our hands saying?... noticing what we notice, listen to their awakens  
With our hands we plant seeds, harvest the sky  
Mixing, kneading, folding, dirt into stars” (texture 2018)

Tentacular thinking—perhaps to think is to touch in multiplicity. When the imaginary—the shape of philosophy, political science, art, language, social science—does not have the capacity to hold nurturing discussions and opening ideas for other worlds, we feel with our hands, we think with tentacles (Haraway 2016:30)

[Manos te  
manos te quiero  
manos te quiero ver libre  
manos que quieren volver

Nuestra palma creativa, oráculo de creación infinita  
ofvidadas por la educación, víctimas de la industrialización  
nos cortaron las manos y nos crecieron al cabeza  
se han quedado vacías entre tanto objeto obsoleto  
les han hecho creer que son sólo carne y hueso.  
// escucha. Escucha. Son las voces de tus manos magas.  
más sabías que su agua bendita//

Her-manos

Cómplices en busca de otros manos  
cunas alumbrando la noche en llamas  
manos que reciben a la pachamama

Manos lucha  
manos fuerza  
manos vivas  
manos calientes

Manos que vibran contentas  
manos luz  
manos desobedientes

Manos con sed  
manos íntimas  
manos valientes

Manos que curan sobando  
manos alegres sembrando  
manos candela  
Café  
Canela  
manos selva  
Sol  
luna llena

Manos autodefensa  
calle nuestra  
manos tierra  
vida plena

Manos espejo  
Voz  
Universo

Manos abajo  
manos autonomía  
manos arriba  
manos respeto  
manos que rompen el concreto

Hu-manos

Manos golpe  
manos guerra  
manos impunes  
manos al viento

Manos que gozan y ríen  
manos gordas blancas, morenas  
tibias, secas, locas, sin pena  
manos tequio, gozona, mingo, faena

Manos que tocan tu boca  
manos que aprietan despacio  
manos que escriben desnudas  
manos que sudan locura

A-mano

Manos te jate  
Mole  
Chocolate

Manos que tejen  
manos que mecen  
manos con uñas  
manos con dientes

Manos soñando dignas  
manos suspiro  
manos de amanecer  
manos soplando libertad  
manos te quiero ver crecer

Como las olas del mar  
tus manos vienen y van  
como las olas del mar  
mi playa tuya será  
(Caraballo 2015:24-27)]

What does breath do to your hands? *Breathe through them: in... out... in...*

Lama Rod Owens talks about how healing is a process, a “movement and work toward wholeness” (2016:67). adrienne maree brown feeds with her words: “It is healing behavior, to look at something so broken and see the possibility and wholeness in it. That’s how I work as a healer: when a body is between my hands, I let wholeness pour through. We are all healers too—we are creating possibilities, because we are seeing a future full of wholeness” (brown 2017:19). This ties to Audre Lorde’s sensation of the erotic, and hearted belief in its power. She presents to us an understanding of the erotic of not only a doing, but a fullness in how we feel in the doing (1984:54). What might a radical healing presence look like? How might it hold, how might it pour?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs shares: “‘We can learn to mother ourselves’...I still don’t know what it means. Except that love is possible even in a world that teaches us to hate ourselves and the selves we see waiting in each other. Except that in a world that says that we should not be born, and that says ‘no’ to our very beings everyday, I still wake up wanting you with a ‘yes’ on my heart. Except that I believe in how we grow our bodies into place to live at the very sight of each other. We can learn to mother ourselves. I think it means you and me” (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016:20).

“they attended to their fingertips. ridges and pulse. they channeled all their memory into their hands as if they knew what would happened to their brains and were determined to be able to make the world they needed from muscle memory. they believed in their reaching hands at least, that when the day came when they could not recognize themselves, at least some of their tired



legs would lead them home and their open hands (their pulsing fingers) would be welcomed back again” (Gumbs 2018:51)

*(neck)*

“Notice our neck...what work is it doing?  
Our neck reminds of us the strength in vulnerability, of a ceaseless connection” (texture 2018)

The erotic Audre Lorde draws is “an assertion of the lifeforce” of our bodies—the knowledge and use of our bodies that we can reclaim through our movements, our ebbing and flowing (1984:55). An interconnection of bodies through space and time. Reverend angel Kyodo Williams professes, “People have to experience their interdependence. To recognize that any limit in your ability to love limits my ability to love. One has to penetrate the truth of interdependence such that I am moved to a place in which I am not doing something for you, but it is actually about me, which is tied to you because there is, in an absolute sense, no separation” (2016:199).

What does breathing into your neck feel like?

“this space is woven. multicolored bright patterns lovingly threaded together. when you touch them, you know that each piece was worn by someone who believed in this quilted moment. this soft vibrant welcoming space.

and you can feel that the hands that stitched this together stitched it with love and desire, creativity and connection. they laughed sometimes when they were stitching and cried sometimes as the memories came through, they were grateful to transform each memory into love. you can feel their presence as you put the fabric on your hands. as you begin weaving now.” (Gumbs 2018:167)

*(head)*

“Our head... do we feel its weight?  
Our head not only carries a consciousness of ourselves, but a consciousness of others—  
Cultivating trust, respect, and dignity” (texture 2018)

[They fling themselves around my neck and her laughter tastes like pulp. The weight is always nice. It’s not suffocation or stagnation, some get confused. It’s a reminder of my own. That the body i am is weight. A force that only makes sense in the context of it all it is because it is from. It falls because it has roots always pulling its center, it rises with the lightness it learns from the air. She’s nice to remind me. Not a solid form, but a steady one. The weight of water—salty and pushing and pulling and wet. It doesn’t quite matter, just whole regardless]

“when the memories started to come back we were sleeping. not quite dreaming but regenerating our cells. almost dreaming that we were regenerating cells. on the verge of regenerating the cells that would let us dream deep enough to remember.

we didn’t know about the liver cells that could sing. the stomach lining kaleidoscopes. the geometric worlds in our larynxes. we had explored our bodies like battlefields and colonies. never like funhouses or arboretums. until our days became boardwalks on a rising sea and the nights we could sleep became worth saving, like named and labeled trees.

when the memories started to come, we were untrained. we didn’t even know how to tell each other what was happening. eventually we would learn to share what went on while we were

sleeping with all the specificity we had reserved for waking life. but at that time, when the memories came back, we were only starting to know.” (Gumbs 2018:81)

(*mouth*)

“Let’s find our mouth...noticing what we notice, can we linger on its lightness and warmth?  
A home ripe with care, our mouth mirrors our willingness to walk” (texture 2018)

To talk of revolution without centering everyday life, “without understanding what is subversive about love” is to speak with “a corpse in [one’s] mouth” (Montgomery and bergman 2017:19). For “If I do not [courageously] love the world—if I do not love life—if I do not love people—I cannot enter into dialogue” (Freire 2000:89-90).

*Breathe out... breathe in... breathe out...*

Time is muddy. Testimony is the lips’ choreography of time—a weight through the past, a groundedness in the present, and a movement with the future. Organisms live in the spiraling chaos of time, to imagine and build other worlds asks us to, as Donna Haraway says, “stay with the trouble...attached to ongoing pasts, [bringing] each other forward in think presents and still possible futures” (2016:133). There is play, pleasure, and joy in the building of other worlds (Shepard 2011: iv).

“they studied the differences between the words *continuous*, *continual*, and *constant* by writing them in sand on the beach. *every moment less land* their parents whispered where they thought they couldn’t hear. they were raised to believe they could only trust words. words were a place to stand. even though they could be washed away. so they memorized the words in the poems they made for each other and they measured their presence in each other’s lives. which was continuous before the demands of eating scattered them, and then continual when they returned like racing boats. but afterward, everything had changed and there they were with their gray hair and their remembered poems, their eyelashes attuned to her quickly the world can shed itself. and then they thought about the love and called it constant.” (Gumbs 2018:179)

(*nose*)

“What do we smell?... our nose has a humble presence  
It ceaselessly questions: what is the smell of unknowing? The taste of wonder? The texture of tenderness? The color of memory?” (texture 2018)

Jasmine Syedullah prophetically asserts: “It is not enough to know we want freedom. We have to practice it. We have to be able to live it out together...knowing we want freedom is a practice in presence” (2016:83). To be present with one another, ourselves, and the world we deserve to build, we get to cultivate our capacity for presence (Kyodo Williams, Owens, Syedullah 2016:98). We don’t just turn presence on one day. It’s a practice to in and with and through rather than for or as or to.

Trusting in process and each other is crucial to the growth of radical presence, as born out of love (Kyodo Williams, Owens, Syedullah 2016:189). We won’t decide to change and be done. There is no being done, not ultimate horizon without a way of

walking. In the walking we remember that horizons don't exist to be reached, but to be walked towards with company. The worlds we dream of, our utopias, exist through the ways we build them, not in a final product. "All that you touch you Change. All that you Change Changes you. The only lasting truth is Change. God is Change." (Butler 1993).

And building can hold joy—"And that deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible... Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens" (Lorde 1984:57).

"*hold water*. mother weaver said as she walked up and down the rows. the students looped the grasses up and down and over and around. *a basket should be able to hold water*." (Gumbs 2018:135)

(eyes)

"Are our eyes closed?...noticing what we notice, sense their subtle movement  
Movement is practice; let's practice listening with our eyes" (texture 2018)

Reverend angel Kyodo Williams reminds us, "the path of liberation is paved with pain and joy but always near when you know you're just looking to return to you and have to leave the home of Me behind. Enter here. It's everywhere and in everyone." (2016:35)

There is a Zapatista story called "La Historia de las Piedras y los Sueños." The story walks through the creation of the world by the gods, noting how much work it is to build a world, and how at the end of the day the gods would take naps in their hammocks in the sky and sometimes their dreams would fall down to the earth. Their dreams were what we call stones—beautiful stones, stones that sang songs of peace and joy, stones that shone and laughed and children played with, stones that murmured love into the earth. When the powerful—the rich and the rulers—came they stole the dream stones and threw them with all their force. The stones went through the ceiling of the world and made little holes that we call stars. Many of these dream stones, too, stayed on earth and became covered with dirt and dust, scattered through the world. This is why the indigenous peoples look to the ground and the stars in walking towards other worlds—looking for the pieces of the dreams of the gods are missing in our heart's song, the story says. And for this, the listening to and for the stones of dreams, is why the indigenous peoples know how to listen to silences, as silences are but words that are broken before the leave, words to listen to in the collective heart (Marcos).

[Busco respuestas  
busco un lugar  
Chiquito  
CÓmodo  
Calientito  
un pequeño tunel

una esfera azul  
un rebozo de arcoiris  
une petite maison  
busco silencio  
Descanso  
Alimento

Cierro los ojos y veo colores nuevos  
rojo, amarillo, verde, violeta, eléctrico  
siento bien de estar adentro  
abro las manos al cielo  
vibran felices entre tierra y universo  
recorro el cuerpo  
observo sin reniegos  
Respiro  
siento bien de estar adentro.  
Caraballo 2015:29]

“they crossed their hands in front of them, held each to the other and pulled back, exposing and lengthening muscles, tugging at the tension they needed in order to be able to grow. no rings. every finger was for learning touch, learning how to be a hand, for palm reading each other’s faces for selves, pasts, futures, and fuck-ups. and their feet were planted, each toe conscripted, pushing down as their heads reached diagonally up. there were places the sun kissed them that they didn’t know about. angles and star patterns ancients had built of stone. their bodies were repeating. not like reproduction, like the rhythm of a poem. they could feel they were growing. biceps singing pulling in triceps teasing pulling out abs engaged. engaged the whole time. if someone had told them that people used to buy each other down, strip each other into skeletons for the purpose of contracts and fear, they would have laughed. and they were strong enough to laugh loud and for a very long time. without dropping each other on the ground. and the ground shook, like the soil was trying to till itself when they looked into each other’s open eyes” (Gumbs 2018:55)

*(ears)*

“...and seeing with our ears” (texture 2018)

Learning to see, to listen, to behold and become is an orientation. bell hooks explains, “what we cannot imagine cannot come into being...we need a map to guide us on our journey to love—starting with the place where we know what we mean when we speak of love” (2000:14). To practice collective understandings is, in a sense, a cartography of consciousness, a choreography.

Another guiding story of the Zapatistas is “El Aire de la Noche.” It illuminates and lulls for us with some opening closing words, “Aprendieron también que la noche encierra muchos mundos y que hay que saber escucharlos para irlos sacando y floreciendo. Con palabras nacen los mundos que la noche tiene. Sonando se hacen

lucos, y tantos son que no caben en la tierra y muchos terminan por acomodarse en el cielo. Por eso dicen que las estrellas se nacen en el suelo” (Marcos).

“what she really wanted in that moment was to hear the ocean. and as she listened to her slow heartbeat and the full and wounded earth, seeking her own stillness, she learned instead that it was all still. It was all still there.” (Gumbs 2018:67)

*(full body)*

“ ...  
How does our body feel?  
Our body breathes with the body of the world  
Together we take a deep breath in, and  
...” (texture 2018)

Collective freedom lives with “insurgence rooted in love” (Kyodo Williams, Owens, and Syedullah 2016:xi)–“bodies moving against the stream...as bodies that bear the wisdom, witness and wounds...prophetic wisdom–of liberation...we bear it together” (Kyodo Williams, Owens, and Syedullah 2016:xvii). That’s a lot of weight in reshaping ourselves. Our bodies, in their performance, hold “powers, capacities, and resistances,” that’s why Silvia Federici believes “Our struggle then must begin with the re-appropriation of our body, the revaluation and rediscovery of its capacity for resistance, and expansion and celebration of its powers, individual and collective. Dance is central to this re-appropriation. In essence, the act of dancing is an exploration and invention of what a body can do: of its capacities, its languages, its articulations of the strivings of our being. I have come to believe that there is a philosophy in dancing, for dance mimics the processes by which we relate to the world, connect with other bodies, transform ourselves and the space around us. From dance we learn that matter is not stupid, it is not blind, it is not mechanical, but has its rhythms, has its language, and it is self-activated and self-organizing, Our bodies have reasons that we need to learn, rediscover, reinvent. We need to listen to their language as the path to our health and healing, as we need to listen to the language and rhythms of the natural world as the path to the health and healing of the earth. Since the power to be affected and to affect, to be moved and move, a capacity which is indestructible, exhausted only with death, is constitutive of the body, there is an immanent politics residing in it: the capacity to transform itself, others, and change the world” (2016).

“then they learned to work with the soil they had. the daily dirt under their fingernails, the collected decomposition of their skin. they would have to grow what they needed from that. sometimes they remembered how many times caterpillars grow whole encasements of skin and shed them again and again before growing the skin that would become chrysalis. but nowadays they were focusing on a much smaller scale of organism. the bacteria swimming across the parched oceans of their eyes. the tiny cities in their intestine. the whole surface of their skins populated and evolving. this was the last step they finally had to understand themselves as planets.” (Gumbs 2018:52)

## **MOVING.**

*(breathing in motion)*

*Let your breathing move you. Breathe in... breathe out... breathe in... as you breathe in, bring your energy and care to your core, as you breathe out, let the energy flow where it may. Follow those motions. Breathe out... breathe in... breathe out... maybe this is a roll, from side, to side, tracing your back's path along the floor, initiating movement from that core place, letting the ground so graciously hold your weight. Feel the "fluidity of water and the incessant swelling and receding of the tides" through and between your bodies (Hessler 2018:31).*

Reverend angel Kyodo Williams reminds us, that "It is our relationship to the outer world that is the source of our awakening" (2016:xxix). A breathing through the outer, the other, the self.

“without your  
residential breath  
I lose my timing” (Wang 2018:319)

Fascia is the connective tissue beneath the skin that holds our organs and muscles together. Move with this fascia, this breathing tissue.

and i don't need to remind you that the ocean, the place where the evolutionists and creationists all agree that life began, the source of all the salt we breathed to get here, lives within us. all light is shared with those at the bottom of the ocean. (Gumbs 2018:11)

*(moving)*

*Keep rolling, tidal sways, rising, falling, grounded. As you feel, let this rolling motion take you more and more off the floor.*

Hear the words of Reverend angel Kyodo Williams: "Once you are aware of how you are being policed, you can begin the process of self-liberated, from the position of realizing the mutuality of our liberation rather than suffering under the delusion that you are doing something for me. There is an intimacy in that realization. And because dharma is ultimately about accepting what is, it can undermine the need for control that keeps you invested in the policing of my body, thus freeing yours" (2016:xxvii).

To recognize that bodies are always already in motion, that our movements are already part of a fabric, and to simultaneously feel the power in the idea that "consciousness neither precedes the world nor follow it" (Freire 2000:81) is to (re)member that our bodies in their creative capacity. This offers a call "to transcend the form, the construct that we find ourselves in" (Kyodo Williams, Owens, and Syedullah 2016:xx).

adrienne maree brown thinks in fractals. She calls our existence fractal (brown 2017:13); maybe we move in tessellations? Patterns that repeat and reiterate and re-make in various scales and styles and rhythms. A way of thinking of motion, relation, emotions, movements as scaled breathing, scaled being.

*Let your breathe guide your movement off the floor and through space. Move at whatever pace your breath asks of you.*

brown offers more: “Emergence is beyond what the sum of its parts could even imagine. A group of caterpillars or nymphs might not see flight in their future, but it’s inevitable. It’s destiny. Oak trees don’t set an intention to listen to each other better, or agree to hold tight to each other when the next storm comes. Under the earth, always, they reach for each other, they grow such that their roots are intertwined and create a system of strength that is as resilient on a sunny day as it is in a hurricane. Dandelions don’t know whether they are a weed or a brilliance. But each seed can create a field of dandelions. We are invited to be that prolific. And to return fertility to the soil around us.” (2017:13)

“they called them the air people. and they had their own mythology. they repeated the story of Igbo landing but they said it so fast and airy a lot of the children thought it was egrets landing. and they danced all the crane dances remembering their wings. the air people sang the memories of the people who could fly, but they got their designation from being *of* air, not always *in* the air, it was the way the air moved through them that was strange or necessary, depending on who you asked.

all those centuries of holding breath, policing the smell of breath, keeping a contract with death without honoring the preexisting one with life, made the air people necessary for us. beautiful and filled with light. sometimes when you saw them you thought you were seeing ghosts, but that was because the ancestors took immediately to the open and more open passageways of their songs, their porous limbs, their bodies that didn’t seem to need to hold on to anything for long. they went to their natural extreme and like a dream you would meet them and remember everything and leave surrounded by whispered messages from your own dead and gone” (Gumbs 2018:79)

## **WALKING.**

*(walking)*

*Let’s walk.* As we walk, let’s let Reverend angel Kyodo Williams remind us that “To embody... truth is to live beyond the limits of self-reinforcing habits...transcend the borders erected...to be radical is to constantly live in the territory yet undiscovered, the liberation yet unknown.” (2016:xxii). How are you walking? Where is the tension, weight, lightness, breath that we noticed on the floor in your walking movement? Notice how you walk. *Keep walking.* Consider in what ways you might walk differently. Try those. Listen to how they feel and how you feel others walking beside you.

## *Are your eyes closed?*

Praxis is theory and practice; action and reflection in conversation. Maybe walking is like this too. What might your walk mean, where might it come from, how might it be read or read space? What could other walks be, and how might we walk together in this place?

Within the praxis of the Zapatistas is the notion of *caminando preguntando*. To walk asking. An action and a reflection; a constant reimagining and painting of the horizon and why and how we walk towards it. We walk towards other worlds, with other worlds.

“only water and love. only peace and breath. she is emptying her bladder for the gods. her heart for the here after here. her mind for the moving moment. her lungs for pushing through. she woke up on a planet with no land again. and all the leg strength she had built pushing her brain towards the sky, pushing the rock-hard reality down, standing up for this or that, was now for floating. in this water without salt shore. so much for buoyancy. and even the salt within her pores pours out with the effort of balance. diluted by the fact. no land. just love. no anchor. just air. the weight of breath within her the heaviest heaven. her mind becoming clear, her heart becoming light. and the light within is not the sun. her body not an island, but enough.” (Gumbs 2018:108)

*(improvisation, solo)*

*Let your walk take whatever form it will as you move through the space. Play with rhythm and shape and texture. There is no wrong movement—take chances, and use this as a practice in embracing messiness.* How can we live through “joyous failure” (Kyodo Williams, Owens, and Syedullah 2016:xxix)?

Danielle Goldman confides, “I have come to believe that improvised dance involves literally giving shape to oneself by deciding how to move in relation to an unsteady landscape. To engage oneself in this manner, with a sense of confidence and possibility, is a powerful way to inhabit one’s body and to interact with the world” (2010:5).

Remember tidalectics? “We must shed our human perceptions of length and breadth and time and place, and enter vicariously into a universe of all-pervading water” (Hessler 2018:157). Being of water, we can sense that movement is possible and unavoidable, and in this sense there’s a politics to movement (Martin 1998:1-2). What might we move towards? What paths might we trace, and (re)trace?

There will be no end, no perfection, no eternal bliss. We have to learn to “[stay] with the trouble... [to] redo ways of living and dying attuned to still possible flourishing, still possible recuperation” (Haraway 2016:10). No right ways, but many ways. No one world, but many worlds. Many worlds of still possible flourishing. Worlds of



“mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations” (Haraway 2016:1).  
Ever multiple choreographies of our bodies.

“was she dipped in paint. split open like achilles. where was she weak? she looked at her body and saw only pores. only wet spaces, vessel, opening, she was whole. was she. born or made. was she possible? she looked at her fingertips for a seam. pinched her skin in case it was all a dream. was she real? the new female being, first of her kind, couldn’t believe herself.” (Gumbs 2016:15)

### **MEETING/TOUCHING.**

*(contact, sitting in it)*

*As you move through the space, notice if your eyes are closed or open. Let them be as you will. If you feel comfortable, perhaps allow yourself to move with your eyes closed. Walk or move slowly about the space. When your body comes into contact with another body, pause, for a moment, to sit in the present and possibility there. Nothing much, but maybe it’s a lot. Try to move with care, wandering. Allow yourself to touch and be touched. To be in that connection for a moment and then continue wandering.*

It becomes us to “[know] how to depend on each other, how to be encumbered with and responsible for each other” (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016:57), to choose to love and find ourselves in the other (hooks 2000:93). To trust in gathering and recenter ourselves in proximity.

adrienne maree brown writes, “Together we must move like waves. Have you observed the ocean? The waves are not the same over and over—each one is unique and responsive. The goal is not to repeat each other’s motion, but to respond in whatever way feels right in *your* body. The waves we create are both continuous and a one-time occurrence. We must notice what it takes to respond well. How it feels to be in a body, in a whole—separate, aligned, cohesive. Critically connected.” (2017:16)

Touch creates, shapes, and holds. Molds our sense of time, space and self. When we touch one another with care, responsibility, and sacredness we practice unlearning the fear, competition, and violence rote into us everyday. We (re)member magic. Erin Manning claims, “The only thing we can grasp, momentarily, are touch’s inventions” (2007:xiv). Can we invent other worlds as we move, here, with our eyes closed, together? There’s a concept of joy that some radicals pull from, that understands joy as “one’s power to affect and be affected” (Montgomery and bergman 2017:29-30). Letting touch affect us, and our touch affect others, is no small action.

“then we cleared out the shelf space in our lungs. we dusted our convenient ribs. we trusted our muscular hearts, we tied ribbons all around inside. we laced them through our organs with no function but love. then we noticed that the only function of our organs was love. and we let them breathe again.

we took off our leaden clothes and we skipped out of our concrete shoes and we went barefoot enough to bear the rubble we had created just before. we let the sun touch us and felt what we had done to the ozone in our daze. we noticed that skin was just as thin as it should have been and all that we had been calling skin before were layers of accumulated scars.

we touched each other's hands and found them warm and ridged and remembering. we traced the line and found home again and again. home was like a pulse. home was where the hurt was. we lunged and pressed towards each other's chests. we let longing lead long past our labored neck. we held each other's hands. they did not break.

we painted the walls with our breathing. we painted the walls with our breathing. we painted the walls with our breathing and found they were not walls at all. they were forests of our forgetting, beautiful and dark with medicine. we marveled. at the patience of the trees.” (Gumbs 2018:83)

*(walking)*

*Let's walk again.*

The present is pregnant with possibility (Klein and Noeth 2011:33), as “Empire is already full of cracks, and the future is always uncertain” (Montgomery and bergman 2017:33). The future is choreographed now in our improvisation. Our bodies are power. Fractals. Synchronies between time and space, scaled movements and reality-makings. Erin Manning writes, “The body does not move *into* space and time, it *creates* space and time” (2007:xiii). We help create reality. That is power.

Silvia Federici shares: “‘You live the commons, you can not talk about them, and even less theorize them.’ That I imagine is because of the difficulty to give words to such a powerful and rare experience as that of being part of something larger than our individual lives, of dwelling on ‘this earth of mankind’ not as a stranger or a trespasser, which is the way [the contemporary systems wish] us to relate to the spaces we occupy, but as home” (2019:77).

[“Poética para tejer nuestros caminos. Ética para sentipensar las decisiones. Política para transformar-nos juntas. Polética desde abajo que apuesta por la vida compartida. Poléticas del cuerpo. Poléticas de cuerpos reapropiados, manos que sanan, muertxs que ríen. Poléticas de corazones abiertos y libertades comunes.” (Caraballo 2015:3)]

“they looked each other in the eyes every time and did not leave each other without singing a prayer: the name or the wish. they learned to add touching hands into the ritual, a tradition newly sacred after the memory of the epidemic.

and of course none of that would have been possible if they didn't remember to look themselves in the eye every morning, or to chant the name of the prayer. or to track their dreams for keeping and sharing.

there is a sacredness to every day. every time.

it means again and again. it means all of us. it means this moment. this time. you and me. we're here.

which was something they would never again take for granted.” (Gumbs 2018:104)

*(contact, pouring)*

*As you move, play again with contact. Coming to touch another body, allow a moment for the touch to be, and then pour into one another. Slowly. Listen to the conversations of your bodies, as one body leans weight into another, whose touch deepens to hold, and let that pouring go between bodies. Try to keep the contact to a small place, and give that place your wholeness, your care and presentness as you pour and are poured into. Filling and (re)filling.*

“‘Like the movement of the ocean she’s walking on, coming from one continent/continuum, touching another, and then receding (‘reading’) from the island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of the(ir) future’” (Hessler 2018:31)

Thomas Merton proclaims “‘We do not become fully human until we give ourselves to each other in love’” (hooks 2000:76). I like this. Do you? It’s po[u]rous, like skin, like mothering—“The queer thing is that we affirm each other beyond the limits of our bodies, our limits, and our imaginations” (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016:116). A radical posture of support and solidarity (Freire 2000:49).

Nick Montgomery and carla bergman use “joyful militancy” to describe the ways organizing can tear apart and transgress rigid radicalism. They warn and welcome this practice as “a dangerous, transformative, and experimental process, generated collectively and held gently” (2017:34).

“instead they read the blood as blood. and it meant everything at once. it meant once there was water. it meant once there was birth and possible birth. it meant there were ancestors and that someone had survived. it meant life was precious and could spill. it meant spirit was sticky and could stay.  
and actually that’s all i was trying to say.” (Gumbs 2018:212)

## **IMPROV.**

*(moving)*

*Move again as you will.*

“A complex movement  
over and over again  
it becomes known  
the peace we seek  
is seeking us  
the joy a full bud  
awaiting our attention  
justice in our hands  
longing to be practiced  
the whole world

learning  
from within  
this thrilling mote in the universe  
laboratory  
labyrinth  
internalize demands  
you are the one  
you are waiting for  
externalize love  
binds us together  
a greater self  
a complex movement  
a generative abundance  
an embodied evolution  
learn to be here  
critique is a seductress  
her door is always open  
so what if you get some  
we are going further  
past reform, to wonder  
this requires comprehension  
that cannot fit in words  
out beyond our children  
beyond the end of time  
there is a ceaseless cycle  
a fractal of sublime  
and we come to create it  
to soil our hands and faces  
loving love and loving  
ourselves, and all our places” (brown 2017:25-25)

“A conversation with my six-year-old about revolution  
when 3 feet of sunshine missing two front teeth  
asked me why do we need revolution  
all i had was a grenade in my mouth.

i held him for a while and watched him draw  
clouds and trees and ladybugs and a house  
filled with everybody he loves

when was the last time we put to image  
what we thought the world should be  
when did it become enough to know  
how to promptly explode

I said to him he was much better equipped

to figure out the revolution than his mama  
that if i don't he's got to disarm this bomb  
and throw it out the window

cause the revolution is not about self-defense  
it's about self-creation, it's about seeing farther  
than the walls directly in front of us

and my six-year-old has got a head start" (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016:43)

"this is what it takes to cool the planet. hold the world together. protect the mysteries (despite the surface violence. and the pollution you try to bury in your heart).

this is what it takes. the strength of no separation. the bravery of flow. the audacity of never saying this is me, this is not you. this is mine, this is not yours. this is now, this was not ever before.

if you listen, each drop is saying always always. which is homonym with right now right now. listen to the ocean let go and become one. let go and remain depth. let go and just be everywhere. salt particles aligned with the stars in the sky." (Gumbs 2018:107)

*(improvisation)*

*Now improvise.*

Movement can be rupture. Rupture with what we have known and what we think we might know, imagining and making what we do know and will learn and teach. This is the process of "coming alive and coming apart" (Montgomery and bergman 2017:59-60). To (re)imagine space, to play in it anew. A mothering and a childhood sympoiesis.

José Esteban Muñoz talks about queer utopias. Sharing that, "Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality...We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality...The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel in a *then and there*. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for the minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds...Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing." (2009:1) There is possibility in impossibility—this can be dance's terrain.

"remember when we met? underwater weightless and flowering. remember when we laced fingers or didn't based on tides or passing whales. remember how our breathing turned into what would support us and everything else in the thousand-mile radius of echo. and how our heartbeats were no different than this ocean pulled by moon?" (Gumbs 2018:111)

*(contact improvisation)*

*Let touch pour back in, as we improvise together.*

Play with the wonders of our relational fabric (Johnson 2018:2). The world is a process of creation; worldmaking pulls us back to our power in building a world in which many worlds fit (Klein and Noeth 2011:8). And dance “unfolds its potentiality offering of alternatives, of utopias,” (Klein and Noeth 2011:9) “unthought, untried, extraordinary. Let us improvise.” (Manning 2007:161)

“the first time i thought of you, you were swimming, towards you, through me. first time i thought i was drowning in a world that needed you in it or it would disappear. first time i knew you existed the rest of the history of the world popped like a bubble unready unworthy and my body wanted only future, only you. the first time i felt you move we were deep underwater under something built to keep us under and i couldn’t see anything but i understood there was something above everything. above everything despite everything i would find fresh air and breathe again. above everything despite everything i would free you. my best idea yet.” (Gumbs 2016:13)

*(coming back when you’re ready)*

*And when you feel ready, come back from your improvisation, in whatever time you will.*

Erin Manning, in her *Politics of Touch*, describes the body as processual (2007:xiii). This fits nicely. “Improvised dance literally involves giving shape to... vitality” (Goldman 2010:146).

Tsotsil is one of the languages spoken by some of the Zapatistas. They have no word for love. In conversation with Inés, one of the compas, she pauses for a long time. No hay palabra. Love, she shares with me, is not something to be said, it’s something that exists in action, not language. When love is both nowhere and everywhere it asks for no word. To know this “love” is to feel it and to constantly be in practice of enacting it. Freire says to us, “In the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade” (2000:48). Language and practice will be reflected on and acted upon through change.

Repetition, practice of this love and pedagogy, “is what enables us ‘to regenerate ourselves through the continuing process of redefinition’” (Hartman 1997:75). Repetition (re)grounds, groups and grows—a sort of processual kinesthesia.

The Zapatistas walk with the process of building un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos. A world in which many worlds fit.

“Dance is an art that is not one. Neither singular in where it comes from nor fixed in where it goes, it can be found anywhere, at any time” (Klein and Noeth 2011:33)—it

can be made anywhere, at any time, and make any place, any future. A possibility of utopia existing in the quotidian (Esteban Muñoz 2009:9).

“breathe. she extended her fingers, threw back her head, lowered her shoulders. some days she could lean back into the flow like it was a chair in her living room. safe, held, profoundly understood. *how did the universe teach itself to love me so right?* she laughed and the ripples reached everyone. some people felt it in their shoulders and did a shimmy, some people felt it in their guts and excused themselves. children danced or had to pee. when she breathed her people felt free” (Gumbs 2016:100).